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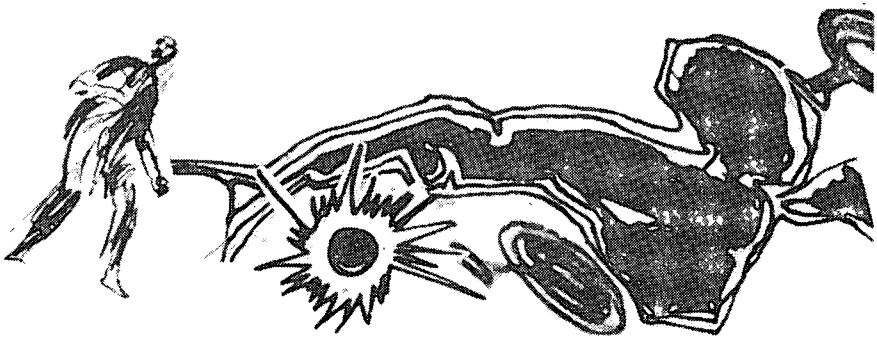

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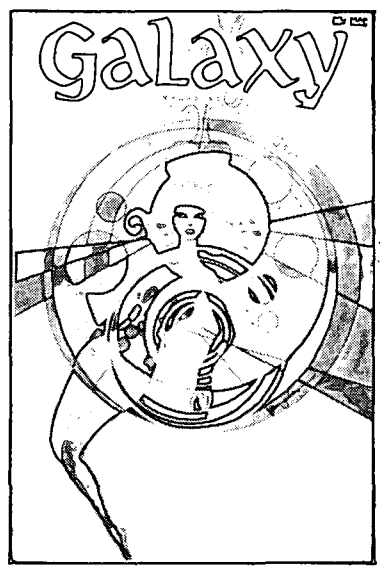

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

MAGAZINE

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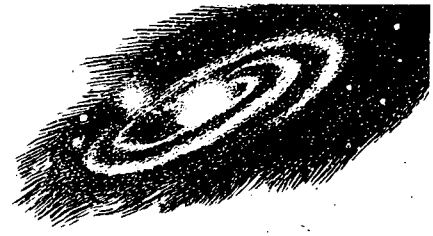

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LETTERS

This will be in the nature of a report to the consumers—the readers of *Galaxy*. You. In case you've ever wondered, your letters have impact. And value.

We hang by them. And sometimes from them. Like from gallows.

Space permitting, I'll try to cover your rections to the last six issues for which reader comments are available: February to July. Hottest topics were Vaughn Bodé's *Sunpot*, Harlan Ellison's *The Region Between* and Jack Gaughan's art work—in reverse order. And comments on the magazines in:

General

. . . I heartily congratulate you on the fine and consistent quality which the magazines under your aegis have displayed. I hope you can continue to present the discerning sf reader a magazine group worthy of his attention and time. The high-quality stories you have run recently give me good reason to believe that the sf field will continue to flourish as a real and pertinent means for extrapolating man's future and through it, a viable and valid examination of man's present.

The new repro of the mags has shown that Jack Gaughan is one of the best artists appearing in the sf mags, if not the best. His mind-bending, imaginative covers and interiors do much to enhance the magazines. I hope that it will soon become feasible to use other artists, to allow the Master to devote more time to each individual illo. Don't want to overwork him either.

I realize that Galaxy *and* If *are having distribution problems. (*If *has already been cut back to bi-monthly; I don't want the same to happen to GALAXY. Hang in there, Mr. J., I'm now seeing both mags appearing on newstands they were absent from for almost a year. I am confident the circulation will again reach (and exceed) its former level as more readers spread the good word and you're seen in the old places again.*

Mitchell Swedo, Jr.
Chicago, Ill.

. . . I have an irksome suspicion you are drastically abridging Algis Budrys' Bookshelf *in Galaxy. If you are, I* know *I wouldn't be alone in saying that I resent this. Mr. Budrys' column is best when it's long, when he is developing his excellent social comments on the field of the books and everything else. He's too good to be cut—he writes little enough new stuff as it is, anyway.*

Don't forsake the Story for the Message. Entertainment is still the prime quality in a story.

May I still offer my compliments? You're O.K.

Steve Larue
Denver, Col.

Every golden word by Budrys has been published in *Galaxy*—what has been forced out of one issue has been included in the next.

(Please turn to page 190)

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These great minds were Rosicrucians...

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Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

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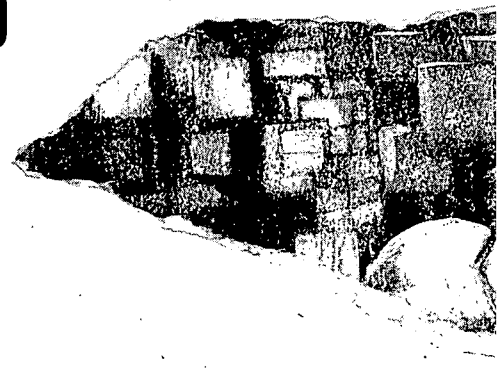
THE WORLD OUTSIDE



ROBERT SILVERBERG

I

INTERFACE Crew Nine works in a flat, high strip of gloomy space stretching along the outside of the service core of Urban Monad 116 from the 700th to 730th floors. Though the work area is lofty, it is scarcely more than five meters deep, a skimpy envelope through which dust motes dance toward sucking filters. Standing within it the ten men of Interface Crew Nine are sandwiched between the urbmon's outer layer of residential and commercial sectors and its hidden heart, the service core, in which the computers are housed.

The crewmen rarely enter the core itself. They function on its periphery, keeping watch over the looming wall that bears the access nodes of the building's master

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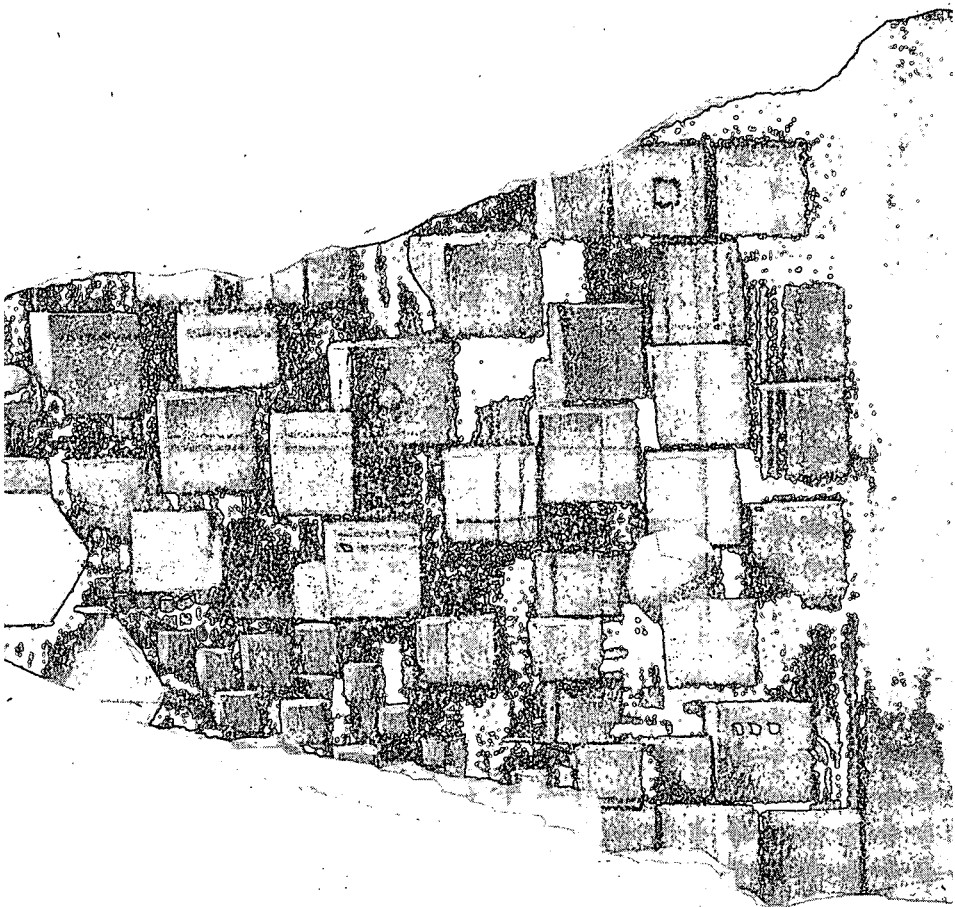

computer nexus. Soft green and yellow lights gleam on the nodes, constantly relaying information about the health of the unseen mechanisms. The men of Interface Crew Nine serve as the ultimate backup for the platoons of self-regulating devices that monitor the workings of the computers. Whenever heavy load causes some facet of the control system to sag, the crewmen quickly prime it so that it can go on bearing its burden. It is not difficult work, but it is vital to the life of the entire gigantic building.

Each day at 1230, when their shift begins, Michael Statler and his nine crewmates crawl through the Edinburgh iris-hatch on 700 and make their way into the perpetual dusk of the interface to take up their primer stations. Pushchairs carry them to their as-

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signed levels—Michael starts by monitoring the nodes spanning floors 709 to 712—and as the day progresses they slide up and down the interface to the changing zones of trouble.

Michael is twenty-three years old. He has been a computer-primer in this interface crew for eleven years. By now the work is purely automatic for him; he has become simply an extension of the machinery. Drifting along the interface, he boosts or drains, shunts or couples, blends or splits, meeting every need of the computer he serves, and does it all in cool mindless efficiency, operating on reflex alone. There is nothing reprehensible about this. It is not desirable for a primer to think, merely to act and act correctly; even here in the fifth century of computer technology the human brain is still given a high rating for its information-handling capacity per cubic centimeter, and a properly trained interface crew is in effect a group of ten of these excellent little organically-grown computers jacked into the main unit. So Michael follows the shifting patterns of lights, making all necessary adjustments, and the cerebral centers of his mind are left free for other things.

He dreams of all the strange places outside Urban Monad 116, places that he has seen on the screen. He and his wife, Stacion, are devoted screen-viewers and they rearely miss one of the travelog shows. The portrayals of the old pre-urbmon world, of the relicts, the dusty remnants. Jerusalem. Istanbul. Rome. The Taj Mahal. The stumps of New York. The tips of London's buildings above the waves. All the bizarre, romantic, alien places beyond the urbmon's skin. Mount Vesuvius. The geysers of Yellowstone. The African plains. The isles of the South Pacific. The Sahara. The North Pole. Vienna. Copenhagen. Moscow. Angkor Wat. The Great Pyramid and the Sphinx. The Grand Canyon. Chichén Itzá. The Amazon jungle. The Great Wall of China.

Do any of these places still exist?

Michael has no idea. A lot of what they show on the screen is a hundred years old or older. He knows that the spread of urbmon civilization has required the demolition of much that is ancient. The wiping away of the cluttered past. Everything carefully recorded in three dimensions first, of course. But gone. A puff of white smoke; the smell of pulverized stone, dry on the nostrils, bitter. Gone. Doubtless they've saved the famous monuments. No need to chew up the Pyramids just to make room for more urbmons. But the big sprawls must have been cleaned away. The former cities. After all, here we are in the Chipitts constellation, and he has heard his brother-in-law Jason Quevedo, the

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historian, say that once there were two cities called Chicago and Pittsburgh that marked the polar ends of the constellation, with a continuous strip of urban settlement between them. Where are Chicago and Pittsburgh now? Not a trace left, Michael knows; the fifty-one towers of the Chipitts constellation rise along that strip. Everything neat and organized. We eat our past and excrete urbmons. Poor Jason; he must miss the ancient world. As do I. As do I.

MICHAEL dreams of adventure outside Urban Monad 116.

Why not go outside? Must he spend all his remaining years hanging in a pushchair on the interface, tickling access-nodes? To go out. To breathe the strange unfiltered air with the smell of green plants on it. To see a river. To fly, somehow, around this barbered planet, looking for the shaggy places. Climb the Great Pyramid! Swim in an ocean, any ocean! *Salt water. How curious*. Stand under the naked sky, exposing his skin to the dread solar blaze, letting the chilly moonlight bathe him. The orange glow of Mars. At dawn to blink at Venus.

"Look, I could do it," he tells his wife. Placid bulgy Stacion. Carrying their fifth little, a girl, coming a few months hence. "It wouldn't be any trouble at all to reprime a node so it would give me an egress pass. And down the shaft and out the building before anybody's the wiser. Running in the grass. Traveling cross-country. I'd go east, I'd go to New York, right by the edge of the sea. They didn't tear down New York—Jason says so. They just went right around it. A monument to the troubles."

"How would you get food?" Stacion asks. A practical girl.

"I'd live off the land. Wild seeds and nuts, like the Indians did. Hunt! The heards of bison. Big, slow brown things; I'd come up behind one and jump on its back, right up there on the smelly greasy hump, and dig my hands into its throat, *yank*! It wouldn't understand. No one hunts any more. Fall down dead—and I'd have meat for weeks. Even eat it raw."

"There aren't any bison, Michael. There aren't any wild animals at all. You know that."

"Wasn't serious. Do you think I'd really kill? *Kill*? God bless, I may be peculiar but I'm not crazy! No. Listen, I'd raid the communes. Sneak in at night, grab off vegetables—a load of protein steak—anything that's loose. Those plares aren't guarded. They don't *expect* urbmon folk to come sneaking around. I'd eat. And I'd see New York, Stacion, I'd see New York! Maybe even find a whole society of wild men there. With boats, planes, something to take me across the ocean. To Jerusalem! To London! To Africa!"

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Stacion laughs. "I love you when you start going flippo like this," she says, and pulls him down next to her. Rests his throbbing head on the smooth taut curve of her gravidity. "Do you hear the little yet?" Stacion asks. "Is she singing in there? God bless, Michael, how I love you."

She doesn't take him seriously. Who would? But he'll go. Hanging there on the interface, flipping switches and palming shunt plates, he envisions himself as a world traveler. A project: to visit all the real cities for which the cities of Urbmon 116 were named. As many as are left. Warsaw, Reykjavik, Louisville, Colombo, Boston, Rome. Tokyo, Toledo, Paris, Shanghai, Edinburgh, Nairobi. London, Madrid. San Francisco. Birmingham. Leningrad. Vienna, Seattle, Bombay, Prague. Even Chicago and Pittsburgh, unless they really are gone. And the others. Did I name them all? He tries to count up. Warsaw, Reykjavik, Vienna, Colombo. He loses track. *But anyway, I'll go out. Even if I can't cover the world. Maybe it's bigger than I imagine it is. But I'll see something. I'll feel rain on my face. Listen to the surf. My toes wriggling in cold wet sand. And the sun! The sun, the sun! Tanning my skin!*

No one ever goes out of the urbmon, except perhaps Louisville people visiting other urbmons, and they don't go often. Supposedly scholars still travel around, visiting the ancient places, but Michael doesn't know of anyone who has. Jason, though he specializes in the twentieth century, certainly hasn't gone. He could visit the ruins of New York, couldn't he? Get a more vivid feel of what it was like. Of course, Jason is Jason, he wouldn't go even if he could. But he ought to. *I'd go in his place. Were we meant to spend all our lives inside a single building?* He has seen some of Jason's cubes of the old days, the open streets, the moving cars, the little buildings housing only a single family, three or four people. Incredibly strange. Irresistibly fascinating. Of course, it didn't work; the whole scrambled society fell apart. *We have to have something that's better organized.* But Michael understands the pull of that kind of life. He feels the centrifugal yank toward freedom and wants to taste a bit of it. *We don't have to live the way they did, but we don't have to live this way, either.* Not all the time. To go out. To experience horizontality. Instead of up and down. Our thousand floors, our somatic fulfillment halls, our sonic centers, our blessmen, our moral engineers, our consolers, our everything. There must be more. A short visit outside: the supreme sensation of my life. I'll do it. Hanging on the interface, serenely nudging his nodes downspectrum as the priming impulses impinge on his re-

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flexes, he promises himself that he won't die with his dream unfulfilled. He'll go out. Some day.

HIS brother-in-law Jason has unknowingly fed the fires of Michael's secret yearning. Jason's theories about a special race of urbmon people, expressed one night when Michael and Stacion were visiting the Quevedos—what had Jason said? *I'm investigating the notion that urbmon life is breeding a new kind of human being. A type that adapts readily to relatively little living space and a low privacy quotient.* Michael had had his doubts about that. That people were cooping themselves up in urban monads. It didn't seem like so much of a genetic thing to him. More like psychological conditioning. Or even voluntary acceptance of the situation in general. But the more Jason spoke, the more sense his ideas made. *Explaining why we don't go outside the urbmons, even though there's no real reason why we can't. Because we recognize that that's a hopeless fantasy. We stay here, whether we like it or not. And those who don't like it, those who eventually can't take it—well, you know what happens to them.* Michael knows. *Down the chute for the flippos. Those who remain adapt to circumstances. Two centuries of selective breeding, pretty ruthlessly enforced. And all of us so well adapted now to this kind of life.*

And Michael saying, *Ah. Yes. All of us so well adapted.* Not believing it was true about all of us.

With some exceptions. Jason's mild concession.

Michael thinks about that, hanging on the interface. No doubt selective breeding accounts for a lot of it. The universal acceptance of urbmon life. Almost universal. Everybody takes it for granted that this is what life is like, 885,000 people under the same roof, a thousand floors, have lots of littles, cuddle up close. Everybody accepts. With some exceptions. *A few of us who look through the windows out at the naked world and rage and sweat inside our guts. Wanting to get out there. Are we missing the gene for acceptance?*

If Jason is right, if the urbmon population's been bred to enjoy the life it has to lead, then there must be a few recessives in the stack. Laws of genetics. You can't eradicate a gene. You just bury it somewhere but it pops up to haunt you eight generations along the track. Me. In me. I carry the filthy thing. And so I suffer.

Michael decides to confer with his sister about these matters.

He goes to her one morning, 1100 hours, when he's fairly sure of finding her at home. She is busy with the littles. His luscious twin, only looking a bit harried just now. Her dark hair askew. Her

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only garment a dirty towel slung over her shoulder. A smudge on her cheek. Looking around, suspicious, as he enters. "Oh. You." She smiles at him. How lovely she looks, all lean and flat like that. Stacion's breasts are full of milk; they swing and joggle, big juicy bags. He prefers supple women.

"Just visiting," he tells Micaela. "Mind if I stay a while?"

"God bless, whatever you like. Don't mind me. The littles are running me up the wall."

"Can I help you?" But she shakes him no. He sits crosslegged, watching her run around the room. Pop this one under the cleanser, that one into the maintenance slot. The others off at school, thank god. Her legs long and lean, her buttocks tight, unpuckered by excess flesh. He is half tempted to top her, right now, only she's too tense from her morning chores. Somehow he hasn't ever done it, at least not in years and years. Not since they were children. He put it into her then, sure, everybody topped his sister. Especially since they were twins—it was natural to get together. A very special closeness, like having an extra self, only female. Asking each other things. She touching him, when they were maybe nine. "What does it feel like, having all that growing between your legs? Dangling. Don't they get in your way when you walk?" And he trying to explain. Later, when she grew her breasts, he asked her the same sort of question. Actually she developed ahead of him. Hair on hers long before he had any on his. And she was bleeding early. That was a kind of gulf between them for a while, she adult, he still a child, and them wombfellows despite it all. Michael smiles. "If I ask you some things," he says, "will you promise not to tell anyone? Even Jason?"

"Have I ever been a blabber?"

"All right. Just making sure."

She finishes with the littles and sinks down, exhausted, facing him. Lets the towel drape itself on her thighs. Chastely. He wonders what she would think if he asked her to. Oh, yes, she'd do it, she'd have to, but would she want to? Or be uncomfortable about opening it for herbrother. She wasn't, once. But that was long ago.

He says, "Have you ever wanted to leave the urbmon, Micaela?"

"To go to another one, you mean?"

"Just to go out. To the Grand Canyon. The Pyramids. Outside. Do you ever feel restless inside the building?"

Her dark eyes glitter. "God bless, yes! Restless. I never thought much about the Pyramids but there are days when I feel the walls on me like a bunch of hands. Pressing in."

"You, too, then!"

"What are you talking about, Michael?"

"Jason's theory. People who've

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bred generation after generation to tolerate urbmon existence. And I was thinking, some of us aren't like that. We're recessives. The wrong genes."

"Throwbacks."

"Throwbacks, yes! Like we're out of place in time. We shouldn't have been born now. But when people were free to move around. I know I feel that way. Micaela, I want to leave the building. Just roam around outside."

"You aren't serious."

"I think I am. Not that I'll necessarily do it. But I want to. And that means I'm a, well, a throwback. I don't fit into Jason's peaceful population. The way Stacion does. She loves it here. An ideal world. But not me. And if it's a genetic thing, if I'm really not fit for this civilization, you ought to be the same way. You having all my genes and me all yours. So I thought I'd check. To understand myself better. Finding out how well adjusted you were."

"I'm not."

"I knew it!"

"Not that I want to leave the building," Micaela says. "But other things. Emotional attitudes. Jealousy, ambition. I have a lot of unblessworthy stuff in my head, Michael. So does Jason. We had a fight over it only last week." She chuckles. "And we decided that we were throwbacks, the two of us. Like savages out of ancient times. I don't want to go into all the details—but yes, yes, basically I think you're right, you and I aren't really urbmon people inside. It's just a veneer. We pretend."

"Exactly! A veneer!" Michael slaps his hands together. "All right. It's what I wanted to know."

"You won't go out of the building, will you?"

"If I do, it'll just be a short while. To see what it's like. But forget I said it." He detects distress in her eyes. Going to her, pulling her up into his arms, he says, "Don't mess me up, Micaela. If I do it, it'll be because I have to. You know me. You understand that. So keep quiet until I'm back. If I go."

HE HAS no doubts at all now, except about some of the peripheral problems, like saying goodbye. Shall he slip out without saying a word to Stacion? He'd better. She'd never understand and she might cause complications. And Micaela. He is tempted to visit her just before he goes. A special farewell. There's no one he's closer to in the entire building and he might just not return from his outbuilding jaunt. He thinks he'd like to top her and he suspects she wants him. A loving farewell, just in case. But can he risk it? He mustn't place too much faith in this genetic thing—if she finds out that he's actually planning to leave the urbmon, she might just have him picked up and

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sent to the moral engineers. For his own sake. No doubt she considers his project a flippo idea. Weighing everything, Michael decides not to say anything to her. He will top her in his mind. Her lips to his, her tongue busy, his hands stroking her springy firmness. The thrust. Their bodies moving in perfect coordination. *We are only the sundered halves of a single entity, now joined once more. For this brief moment.* It becomes so vivid in his imagination that he nearly abandons his resolution. Nearly.

But in the end he goes without telling anyone.

Done rather easily. He knows how to make the great machine serve his needs. On his regular shift that day he stays a little wider awake than usual, dreams a little less. Monitoring his nodes, riding gain on all the fugitive impulses floating through the giant building's mighty ganglia: food requisitions, birth and death statistics, atmospheric reports, a sonic center's amplification level, the replenishment of groovers in the mechanical dispensers, the urine-recycling figures, communications links, et cetera cetera cetera. And as he makes his adjustments he casually fingers a node and obtains a plug-in to the data reservoir. Now he is in direct contact with the central brain, the big machine. It flashes him a string of brassy spurts of golden light: telling him that it is ready to accept reprimming. Very well. He instructs it to issue one egress pass for Michael Statler of apartment 70411, obtainable by the said Statler on demand at any terminal and valid until used. Seeing the possibilities for cowardice in that, he amends the order immediately: valid only for twelve hours after issuance. Plus ingress privileges whenever requested. The node flashes him on acceptance symbol. Good. Now he records two messages, noting them down for delivery fifteen ours after the issuance of the egress pass. To Mrs. Micaela Quevedo, apartment 76124. *Dear Sister, I did it, wish me luck. I'll bring you some sand from the seashore.* And the other message to Mrs. Stacion Statler, Apartment 70411. Explaining briefly where he has gone and why. Telling her he'll be back soon, not to worry, this is something he has to do. So much for farewells.

He finishes his shift. Now it is 1730. It makes no sense to leave the building with night coming on. He returns to Stacion; they have dinner, he plays with the littles, they watch the screen a while, they make love. Maybe the last time. She says, "You seem very withdrawn tonight, Michael."

"Tired. A lot of shunting on the wall today."

She dozes. He cuddles her in his arms. Soft and warm and big, getting bigger every second. The

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cells dividing in her belly, the magical mitosis. God bless! He is almost unable to bear the idea of going away from her. But then the screen blazes with images of lands afar. The isle of Capri at sunset, gray sky, gray sea, horizon meeting the zenith, roads winding along a cliff overgrown with lush greenery. Here the villa of the Emperor Tiberius. Farmers and shepherds here, living as they did ten thousand years ago, untouched by the changes in the mainland world. No urbmons here. Lovers rolling in the grass, if they want. Pull up her skirt. Laughter; the thorns of berry-laden vines scratching the pink acreage of her buttocks but she doesn't mind. Hearty hot-slotted peasant wench. An example of obsolete barbarism. You and she get dirty together, soil between your toes and ground into the skin of your knees. And look here, these men in ragged grimy clothes, they're passing a flask of golden wine around, right in the fields where the grapes are grown. How dark their skins are! Like leather, if that's what leather really looked like—how can you be sure? Brown, tough. Tanned by the authentic sun. Far below the waves roll gently in. Grottoes and fantastic sculptured rocks by the edge of the sea. The sun is gone behind the clouds and the grayness of sky and shore deepens. A fine mist of rain comes. Night. Birds singing their hymns to the coming of darkness. Goats

Ballantine Books

IT JUST so happens that these bi-monthly issues occur at a time when we could use a lot more space, dammit, to talk about books—as a change from our environment which, however, has not gone away. Yet. Self-preservation comes first, so: In August we are meant to publish (and most certainly will as soon as the author surfaces from under his test tubes) THE USER'S GUIDE TO THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT. Our titles grow more unwieldy as we go along, and the books progressively more activist. This is the one that tells what products to buy and what not. Along with it, of course, THE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW HANDBOOK. **Some**one in editorial was thinking cool. For nostalgic purposes (or Style Of Life), try A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC. For ohmigod, what's **that**, THE ALIEN ANIMALS —which has nothing whatever to do with bems. And so to s.f.

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AUGUST sees two adult fantasies—our very first original work, DERYNI RISING, by Katherine Kurtz: the Deryni being an extra-human race of sorcerors and necromancers; the setting, somewhen around the western marches of pre-Albion. A bouncing, bounding story, solid characterization and a logical conflict of power.

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Really a remarkable first. Great stuff, luckily the first in a proposed trilogy. Hopefully, we'll be doing one a year. This month also—the first volume of William Morris' classic masterwork, THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END. (September sees the second volume. Watch for it. You really have to be a hawk if you're buying off the stands—a worthy reason, for once.) Morris, in the opinion of a few, is an acquired taste. We find his lyrical, simple prose altogether enchanting. Not that he writes in romantic pastels. Indeed, THE WELL is often harsh; it is fantasy by virtue of the fact that Morris, because he believed in the rightness of it, created a world that was simpler, closer to the Earth, stronger than the burgeoning industrialization of his own century.

•

IN SEPTEMBER we are celebrating Bob Silverberg's Heicon honors by reissuing his NEEDLE IN A TIMESTACK, TO OPEN THE SKY and THORNS—and publishing the first of the ALPHA series, which the Pope is editing for us. And James White's HOSPITAL STATION, STAR SURGEON and DEADLY LITTER will once again be available, along with our paperbound ALL JUDGMENT FLED. For you Tolkien fans—a NEW MAP OF MIDDLE EARTH. That's the title. Costs $2.50. My lord, imagine what it would be like for authors if we could get $2.50 for **books**... BB

settling down. He walks the leafy paths, avoiding the hot shining turds, pausing to touch the rough bark of this tree to taste the sweetness of this swollen berry. He can almost smell the salt spray from below. Sees himself running along the beach at dawn with Micaela, both of them naked, the nightfog lifting, the first crimson light splashing their pale skins. The water all golden. They leap in, swim, float, the salty water giving them buoyancy. They dive and paddle underwater, eyes open, studying each other. Her hair streaming out behind her. A trail of bubbles pursuing her kicking feet. He catches up with her and they embrace far from shore. Friendly dolphins watching them. They engender an incestuous little while coupling in the famous Mediterranean. Where Apollo nailed his sister, didn't he? Or was that another god. Classical echoes all around. Textures, tastes, the chilly bite of the dawn breeze as they drag themselves up on shore, the sand sticking to their wet skins, a bit of seaweed tangled in her hair. A boy with a baby goat coming toward them. *Vino? Vino?* Holding out a flask. Smiling. Micaela petting the goat. The boy admiring her slender naked body. *Si*, you say, *vino*, but of course you have no money, and you try to explain, but the boy doesn't care about that. He gives you the flask. You drink deep. Cold wine, alive, tingling. The boy looks at Micaela.

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Un bacio? Why not, you think. No harm in it. *Si, si, un bacio,* you say, and the boy goes to Micaela, puts his lips shyly to hers, reaches up as though to touch her breasts, then does not dare to, and just kisses. And pulls away, grinning, and goes to you and kisses you too, quickly, and then runs, he and his goat, madly down the beach, leaving you with the flask of wine. You pass it to Micaela. The wine dribbling past her chin, leaving bright beads in the brightening sunlight. When the wine is gone you hurl the flask far out to sea. A gift for the mermaids. You take Micaela's hand. Up the cliff, through the brambles, pebbles turning beneath your bare feet. Textures, changes of temperature, scents, sounds. Birds. Laughter. The glorious isle of Capri. The boy with the goat is just ahead, waving to you from beyond a ravine, telling you to hurry, hurry, come and see. The screen goes dark. You are lying on the sleeping platform beside your drowsy pregnant wife on the 704th floor of Urban Monad 116.

He must leave. He *must* leave.

He gets up. Stacion stirs. "Shh," he says. "Sleep."

"Going nightwalking?"

"I think so," he says. Strips. stands under the cleanser. Then puts on a fresh tunic, sandals, his most durable clothes. What else shall he take? He has nothing. He will go like this.

Kisses Stacion. *Un bacio. Ancora un bacio.* The last one, perhaps. Hand resting lightly on her belly a moment. She'll get his message in the morning. Goodbye, goodbye. To the sleeping littles. He goes out. Looks upward as if seeing through the intervening fifty-odd floors. Goodbye, Micaela. Love. It is 0230 hours. Still long before dawn. He will move slowly. Pausing, he studies the walls about him, the metallic-looking dark plastic with the warmth of burnished bronze. A sturdy building, well designed. Rivers of unseen cables snaking through the service core. And that huge, watchful man-made mind in the middle of everything. So easily deceived. Michael finds a terminal in the corridor and identifies himself. Michael Statler, 70411. One egress pass, please. Of course, sir. Here you are. From the slot a gleaming blue circlet for his wrist. Slips it on. Takes the dropshaft down. Gets off at 580 for no particular reason. Boston. Well, he has time to kill. Like a visitor from Venus he wanders the hall, occasionally meeting a sleepy nightwalker on his way home. As is his privilege, he opens a few doors, peers in at the people within, some awake, most not. A girl invites him to share her platform. He shakes his head. "Just passing through," he says, and goes to the dropshaft. Down to 375. San Francisco. The artists live here. He can hear music. Michael has always envied the San Franciscans. They

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have purpose in life. They have their art. He opens doors here, too.

"Come on," he wants to say, "I have an egress pass, I'm going outside! Come with me, all of you!" Sculptors, poets, musicians, dramatists. He will be the pied piper. But he is not sure his pass will get more than one out of the building, and he says nothing. Down, instead. Birmingham. Pittsburgh, where Jason toils to rescue the past, which is beyond rescue. Tokyo. Prague. Warsaw. Reykjavik. The whole vast building is sitting on his back now. A thousand floors, 885,000 people. A dozen littles are being born as he stands here. A dozen more are being conceived. Maybe someone is dying. And one man is escaping. Shall he say goodbye to the computer? Its tubes and coils, its liquid-filled guts, its tons of skeleton. A million eyes everywhere in the city. Eyes watching him, but it's all right, he has a pass.

First floor. All out.

This is so easy. But where is the exit? *This*? Just a tiny hatch. But he was expecting a grand lobby, onyx floors, alabaster pillars, bright lights, polished brass, a shining swinging glass door. Of course no one important ever uses this exit. High dignitaries travel by quickboat, arriving and departing at the landing stage on the thousandth floor. And the courier pods of farm produce from the communes enter the urbmon far belowground. Perhaps years at a time go by between each traversal of the first-floor opening. Yet he will. How shall he do it? Holds his egress pass up, hoping there are scanners nearby. Yes. A red light blazes above the hatch. And it opens. It opens. He goes forward, finding himself in a long, cool tunnel, poorly lit. The hatch door closing behind him. Yes, well, preventing contamination by outside air, he supposes. He waits, and a second door opens in front of him, creaking a little. Michael sees nothing beyond; only darkness, but he roes through the door, and feels steps, seven or eight of them, and descends them, coming unexpectedly to the last. Bump. And then the ground. Strangely spongy, strangely yielding. Earth. Soil. Dirt. He is outside.

He is outside.

II

HE FEELS somewhat like the first man to walk on the moon. A faltering step not knowing what to expect. So many unfamiliar sensations to absorb at once. The hatch closing behind him. On his own, then. But unafraid. I must concentrate on one thing at a time. The air, first. He pulls it deep into his throat. Yes, it has a different taste, sweeter, more alive, a natural taste; the air seems to expand as he breathes it, seeking out the folds

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and byways of his lungs. In a minute, though, he can no longer isolate the factors of novelty in it. It is simply air, neutral, familiar. As if he has breathed it all his life. Will it fill him with deadly bacteria? He comes from an aseptic sealed environment, after all. Lying puffed and discolored on the ground in final agonies an hour from now, maybe. Or strange pollen borne by the breeze, sprouting in his nostrils. Choked by massing fungi. Forget the air. He looks up.

Dawn is still more than an hour away. The sky is blue-black; there are stars everywhere and a crescent moon is high. From the windows of the urbmon he has seen the heavens, but never like this. Head back, legs flung wide, arms outstretched. Embracing the starlight. *A billion icy lances striking my body.* He is tempted to strip and lie naked in the night until he is starburned, moonburned. Smiling, he takes another ten steps away from the urbmon. Glancing back then. A pillar of salt. Three kilometers high. It hangs in the air like a toppling mass, terrifying him; he begins to count the floors but the effort dizzies him and he gives up before the fiftieth. At this angle most of the building is invisible to him, rising so steeply over his head, yet what he sees is enough. Its bulk threatens to crush him. He moves away, into the gardened plaza. The frightening mass of a nearby urbmon looms in front of him, at a distance sufficient to give him a truer picture of its size. Jabbing the stars, almost. So much, so much! All those windows. And behind them 850,000 people or more whom he has never met. Littles, nightwalkers, computer-primers, consolers, wives, mothers, a whole world up there. Dead. Dead. He looks to his left. Another urbmon, shrouded in the mists of coming day. To his right. Another. He brings his gaze down, closer to earth. The garden. Formal pathways. This is grass. Kneels, breaks off a blade, feels instant remorse as he cradles the green shaft in his cupped hands. *Killer.* He puts the grass in his mouth; not much taste. He had thought it might be sweet. This is soil. Digs his fingertips in. Blackness under his nails. Draws a grooved row through a flowerbed. Sniffs a yellow globe of petals. Looks up a tree. Hand against the bark.

A robot gardener is moving through the plaza, pruning things, fertilizing things. It swings around on its heavy black base and peers at him. Interrogative. Michael holds up his wrist and lets the gardener scan his egress pass. It looses interest in him.

Now he is far from Urbmon 116. Again he turns and studies it, seeing its full height at last. Indistinguishable from 117 and 115. He shrugs and follows a path that takes him out of the line in which

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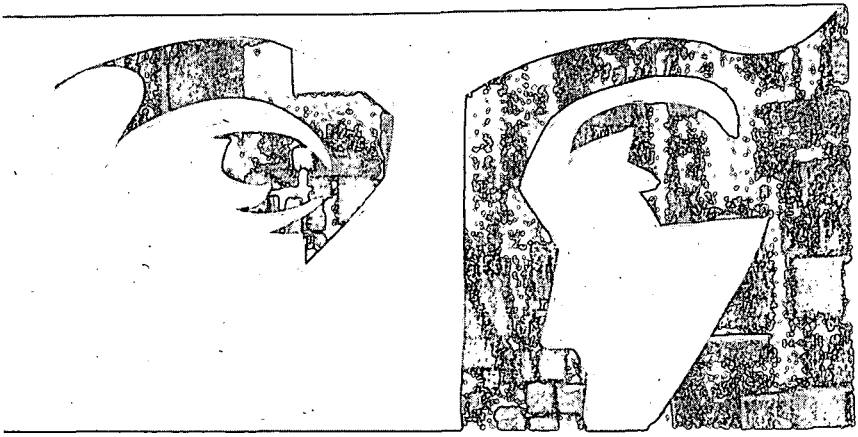

the row of urbmons is set. A pool: he crouches beside it, dipping his hand in. Then puts his face to its surface and drinks. Splashes the water gaily. Dawn has begun to stain the sky. The stars are gone, the moon is going. Hastily he strips. Slowly into the pool, hissing when the water reaches his loins. Swims carefully, putting his feet down now and then to feel the cold muddy floor, at last coming to a place where he no longer can touch bottom. Birds singing. This is the first morning of the world. Pale light slides across the silent sky. After a while he comes out of the water and stands dripping and naked by the edge of the pool, shivering a little, listening to the birds, watching the red disk of the sun climbing out of the east. Gradually

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he becomes aware that he is crying. The beauty of it. The solitude. He is alone at time's first dawn. To be naked is right. *I am Adam*. He touches his genitals. Looking off afar, he sees three urbmons glowing with pearly light and wonders which is 116. Stacion in there, and Micaela. *If only she were with me now. Both of us naked by this pool. While the snake watches from the tree*. He laughs. God bless! He is alone and not frightened at all by it, no one within sight and he loves it, though he misses Micaela, Stacion, both, each. Trembling. Hard with desire. Dropping to the moist black earth beside the pool. Still crying a little, hot teardrops trickling down his face occasionally. He watches the sky turn blue and puts his hand on

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that was so appealing in that tour of Capri. Michael sees long aisles of low plants, separated by strips of bare dark soil, and here and there an entire tremendous field totally empty, as if awaiting seed. These must be the vegetable fields. He inspects the plants: thousands of something spherical and coiled, clutching itself to itself, and thousands of something vertical and grassy, with dangling tassels, and thousands of another kind—and another and another. As he walks *reach from here to the sea if I am a thousand kilometers from the sea now.* His heart sinks. He has no real idea of distances. It might be ten thousand kilometers. He imagines what it would be like to walk from Reykjavik to Louisville 333 times, even horizontally. But with patience he can do it. If only he can find something to eat. These leaves, these stalks, these pods, do him no good. Which part of the plant is edible, anyway? Must he cook it? How? This jour-

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ney will be more complex than he imagined. But his alternative is to scurry back to the urbmon and he will not do that. It would be like dying, never having lived. He goes on.

Tiring. A little lightheaded from hunger, since he's been on the trek six or seven hours now. Physical fatigue, too. This horizontal walking must use different muscles. Going up and down stairs is easy. Riding dropshafts and liftshafts is easier still—the short horizontal walks along the corridors have not prepared him for this. The ache in the backs of the thighs. The rawness in the ankles, as of bone grating against bone. The shoulders struggling to keep the head held high. Scrambling over this irregular earthy surface multiplies the problem. He rests a while. Soon afterward he comes to a stream, a sort of ditch cutting across the fields. He drinks, then strips and bathes. The cool water refreshes him. He goes on, stopping three times to sample the unripened crops. Suppose you get too far from the urbmon to get back, if you begin starving? Struggling through these fields as strength leaves you, trying to drag yourself across the kilometers toward the far-off tower. Dying of hunger amidst all this green plenty. No. He'll manage.

Being alone starts to upset him, too. Something of a surprise, that. In the urbmon he frequently was irritated by the sheer surging multiplicitous masses. Littles underfoot everywhere, clots of women in the halls, that kind of thing. Relishing, in a distinctly unblessworthy way, the daily hours on the interface, in the dimness, no one around him except his nine crewmates and they far away, minding their own nodes. For years cherishing this vision of escaping into privacy, his cruel retrogressive fantasy of solitude. Now he has it and at the beginning he wept for sheer joy of it. But by afternoon it does not seem so charming. He finds himself darting little hopeful glances to the periphery of his sight, as if he might pick up the aura of a passing human being. Perhaps if Micaela had come with him it would be better. Adam, Eve. But of course she wouldn't have. Only his fraternal twin—not precisely the same genes. She's restless but she'd never have done anything as wild as this. He pictures her trudging beside him. Yes. Stopping now and then to top her in the green crops. But the aloneness is getting him.

He shouts. Calls his name. Micaela's, Stacion's. Cries out the names of his littles. "I am a citizen of Edinburgh!" he bellows. "Urban Monad 116! The 704th floor!" The sounds float away toward the fleecy clouds. How lovely the sky is now, blue and gold and white.

A sudden droning sound out of

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the—north? Growing louder moment by moment. Harsh, throbbing, raucous. Has he brought some monster upon himself by his noise? Shading his eyes. There it is: a long black tube soaring slowly toward him at a height of, oh, maybe a hundred meters at most. Throws himself to the ground, huddles between the rows of cabbages or turnips or whatever. The black thing has a dozen stubby nozzles protruding along its sides. From each nozzle spurts a cloudy green mist. Michael understands. Spraying the crops, probably. A poison to kill insects and other pests. What will it do to me? He coils, knees to his chest, hands to his face, eyes closed, mouth buried in palm. That terrible roaring overhead; *kill me with decibels if*

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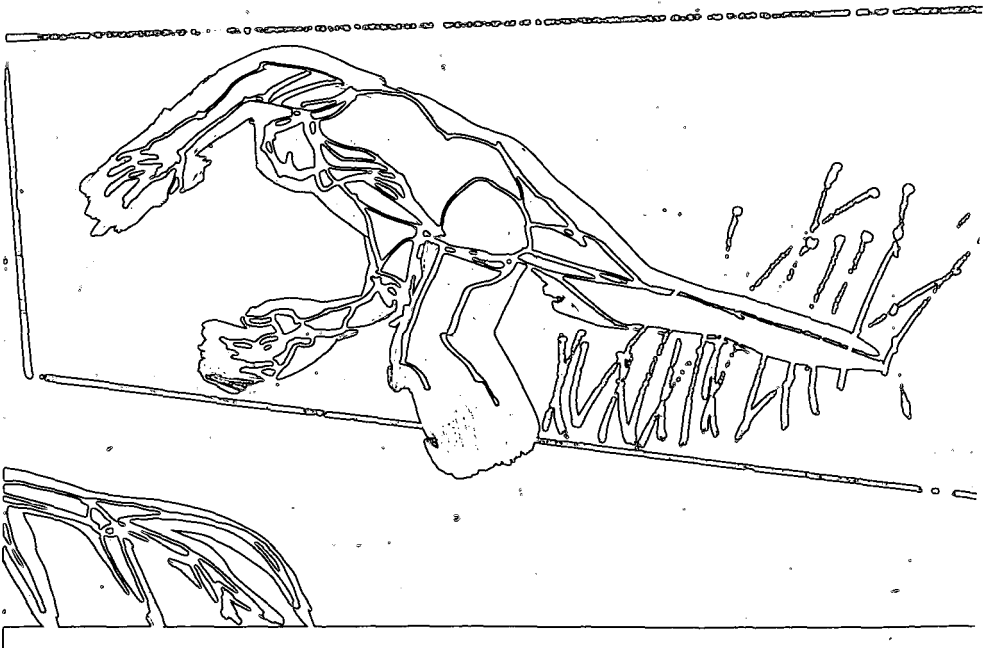

not with your filthy spray. The intensity of the sound diminishes. The thing is past him. The pesticide is drifting down, he supposes, trying not to breathe. Lips clamped. Fiery petals dropping from heaven. Flowers of death. There it is now, a faint dampness on his cheeks, a clinging moist veil. How soon will it kill him? He counts the passing minutes. Still alive. The flying thing no longer in earshot. Cautiously he opens his eyes and stands up. Perhaps no danger, then—but he runs through the fields toward the glittering ribbon of a nearby creek and plunges in, peeling in panic, to scrub himself. And only coming out realizes the creek must have been sprayed too. Well, he's not dead yet, anyway.

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How far is it to the nearest commune?

SOMEHOW, in their infinite wisdom, the planners of this farm have allowed one low hill to survive. Mounting it in mid-afternoon, Michael takes stock. There are the urbmons, curiously dwindled. There are the cultivated fields. He sees machines now, moving in some of the rows, things with many arms, possibly pulling up weeds. No sign of a settlement, though. He descends the hill and shortly encounters one of the agricultural machines. The first company he's had all day. "Hello. Michael Statler, from Urbmon One-sixteen. What's your name, machine? What kind of work do you do?"

Baleful yellow eyes study him and turn away. The machine is loosening the soil at the base of each plant in the row. Squirting something milky over the roots. Unfriendly filther, aren't you? Or just not programed to talk. "I don't mind," he says. "Silence is golden. If you could just tell me where I could get a little to eat, though. Or find some people."

Droning sound again. Crot! Another stinking crop-sprayer! He gets down, ready to curl up again —but no, this flying thing is not spraying, nor does it go past. Hovering overhead, it swings into a tight circle, making an infernal holocaust of noise. A hatch opens in its belly. Out drops a double strand of fine golden fiber, reaching to the ground. Down it, riding a clip-pod, slides a human being, a woman, followed by a man. They land deftly and come toward him. Grim faces. Beady eyes. Weapons at their waists. Their only garments are glossy red wraps covering them from thigh to belly. Their skins are tanned; their bodies are lean. The man has a stiff, bushy black beard: incredible, grotesque facial hair! The woman's breasts are small and hard. Both of them drawing their weapons now. "Hello!" Michael calls hoarsely. "I'm from an urbmon! Just visiting your country. Friend! Friend! Friend!"

The woman says something unintelligible.

He shrugs. "Sorry, I don't under—"

The weapon poking in his ribs. How cold her face is! The eyes like icy buttons. Will they kill him? Now the man speaks. Slowly and clearly, very loudly, as one would speak to a three-year-old. Every syllable an alien one. Accusing him of trespassing in the fields, probably. One of the farming machines must have reported him to the commune. Michael points; the urbmons can still be seen from here. Indicates them, taps his chest. For whatever good that will do. They must know where he's from. His captors nod,

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unsmiling. A frosty pair. Arrested. Intruder menacing the sanctity of the fields. Woman takes him by the elbow. Well, at least they aren't going to kill him outright. The devilish noisy flying thing still racketing overhead in its narrow orbit. They guide him toward the dangling fiber strands. The woman is in the clip-pod, now. Goes up. Then the man tells Michael something which he suspects means, "Now you." Michael smiles. Cooperation his only hope. Figures out how to get into the clip-pod; the man makes the adjustments, locking him in, and up he goes. The woman, waiting above, depods him and pushes him into a webwork cradle. Keeps her weapon ready. A moment later the man is aboard too; the hatch closes and the flying machine goes roaring off. During the flight both of them interrogate him, hurling little jabbing bursts of words at him, but he can only reply apologetically, "I don't speak your language. How can I tell you what you want to know?"

Minutes later the machine lands. They jostle him out onto a bare reddish-brown field. Along its rim he sees low flat-roofed brick buildings, curious snub-fronted gray vehicles, several many-armed farming machines and dozens of men and women wearing the glossy red loincloths. Not many children. Perhaps they're at school, although it's getting late in the day. Everyone pointing at him. Speaking rapidly. Harsh, unintelligible comments. Some laughter. He is frightened somewhat, not by the possibility of peril as much as by the strangeness of everything. He knows this must be an agricultural commune. All this day's walking was prelude; he now has truly passed over from one world to another.

THE man and woman who captured him push him across the bare field and through the crowd of farming folk into one of the buildings nearby. The farmers finger his clothing as he passes, touch his bare arms and face, murmur softly. Wonderstruck. Like a man from Mars in their midst. The building is poorly lit, roughly constructed, with crooked walls, low ceilings, warped floors of some pale pocked plastic material. He is dumped into a bare, dismal room. A sour smell pervades it—vomit? Before she leaves him the woman points out the facilities with a few brusque gestures. A basin of some white artificial substance with the texture of smooth stone, yellowing and cracked in places. There is no sleeping platform, but probably he is meant to use the heap of rumpled blankets against one wall. No sign of a cleanser. For excretion he has a single unit, nothing more than a kind of plastic funnel going into

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the floor, with a button to push when he wishes to clear it. Evidently it is for urine and feces both. An odd arrangement—but then he realizes they wouldn't need to recycle wastes here. The room has no source of artificial light. Through its one window streams the last feeble sun of the afternoon. The window faces the plaza where the farmers still are gathered, discussing him; he sees them pointing, nodding, nudging each other. There are metal bars on the window, set too close together to permit a man to slip through. A prison cell, then. He checks the door. Locked. How friendly of them. He'll never reach the seacoast this way.

"Listen," he calls to those in the plaza, "I don't mean any harm! You don't need to lock me up!"

They laugh. Two young men stroll over and stare solemnly at him. One of them puts his hand to his mouth and painstakingly covers his entire palm with saliva; when this is done he offers the palm to his companion, who presses his hand against it. Both break into wild laughter. Michael watches, mystified. He has heard about the barbaric customs in the communes. Primitive, incomprehensible. The young men say something contemptuous-sounding to him and walk away. A girl takes their place by his window. Fifteen, sixteen years old, he guesses. Her breasts are large and deeply tanned and between them hangs an explicit phallic amulet. She fondles it in what strikes him as lascivious invitation. "I'd love to," he says. "If you can only get me out of here." He puts his hands through the bars as if to caress her. She leaps back wild-eyed and makes a fierce gesture, jabbing her left hand at him with the thumb clenched under and the other four fingers aimed at his face. Clearly an obscenity. As she goes, some older people come to stare. A woman taps her chin in slow, steady, apparently meaningful rhythm; a withered man soberly presses his left palm to his right elbow three times; another man stoops, puts his hands on the ground and rises, lifting them far above his head, perhaps pantomiming the growth of a lofty plant, perhaps the construction of an urban monad. Whatever, he breaks into shrill laughter and stumbles off. Night is coming, now. Through the dusk Michael sees a succession of crop-spraying machines landing in the plaza like birds returning to the nest at sundown. Dozens of many-legged mobile farming units come striding from the fields. The onlookers vanish; he watches them going into the other buildings around the plaza. Despite the uncertainties of being a prisoner, he is captivated by the alien nature of this place. To live so close to the ground, to walk about all day long under the

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naked sun, to know nothing of an urbmon's crowded richness—

An armed girl brings him dinner, popping his door open, setting down a tray, leaving without a word. Stewed vegetables, a clear broth, some unfamiliar red fruits and a capsule of cold wine: the fruits are bruised and, to his taste, overripe, but everything else is excellent. He eats greedily, cleaning the tray. Then he goes to the window. The center of the plaza is still empty, although at the far side eight or ten men, evidently a maintenance crew, have gone to work on the farming machines by the light of three floating luminous globes. His cell now is in complete darkness. Since there is nothing else to do he removes his clothes and sprawls out on the blankets. Though he is exhausted by his long day's trek, sleep will not come at first: his mind ticks furiously, contemplating options. Doubtless they will interrogate him tomorrow. Someone around here must know the language of the urbmons. With luck he can demonstrate that he means no harm. Smile a lot, act friendly, show an air of innocence. Perhaps even get them to escort him out of their territory. Fly him eastward, dump him in some other commune's land, let him make his way to the sea. Will he be arrested at commune after commune? A dreary prospect. Maybe he can find a route that bypasses the agricultural zone—through the ruins of some former cities, possibly. Unless there are wild men living there. At least the farmers are civilized in their fashion. He envisions himself cooked by cannibals in some blasted rubbleheap, the former Pittsburgh, say. Or just eaten raw. Why are the farmers so suspicious? What can one lone wanderer do to them? The natural xenophobia of an isolated culture, he decides. Just as we wouldn't want a farmer loose in an urbmon. But of course urbmons are closed systems. Everybody numbered, inoculated, assigned to a proper place. These folk have a less rigid system, don't they? They don't need to fear strangers. Try convincing them of that.

He drifts into an uneasy sleep.

HE IS awakened, not more than an hour or two later, by discordant music, raw and disturbing. Sits up: red shadows flickering on the wall of his cell. Some kind of visual projections? Or a fire outside? Rushes to the window. Yes. An immense mound of dried stems, branches, vegetable debris of all sorts, is ablaze in the middle of the plaza. He has never seen fire before, except sometimes on the screen, and the sight of it terrifies and delights him. Those wavering bursts of redness rising and vanishing—where do they go? And he can feel the surging heat even from where he stands. The constant flux,

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the shifting shape of the dancing flames—how incredibly beautiful! And menacing. Aren't they afraid, letting fire loose like this? But of course there's that zone of bare dirt around it. Fire can't cross that. The earth doesn't burn.

He forces his eyes away from the hypnotic frenzy of the fire. A dozen musicians sit close together to the left of the blaze. The instruments weirdly medieval. Everything is operated by blowing or pounding or scraping or pressing keys and the sounds are uneven and imprecise—flickering around the proper pitches but missing by a fraction of a tone. The human element; Michael, whose sense of pitch is unusually good, cringes at these tiny but perceptible variations from the absolute. Yet the farmers don't seem to mind. Unspoiled by the mechanical perfection of modern scientific music. Hundreds of them, perhaps the entire population of the village, sit in ragged rows along the perimeter of the plaza, nodding in time to the wailing, screeching melodies, pounding their heels against the ground, rhythmically clapping their hands to their elbows. The light of the fire transforms them into an assemblage of demons; the red glow ripples eerily over their half-nude bodies. He sees children among them, but still not very many. Two here, three there, many adult couples with one or none. Stunned by the realization: *they limit births here.* His skin crawls. He is amused by his own involuntary reaction of horror; it tells him that no matter what configuration his genes may have, he is by conditioning a man of the urbmons.

The music grows even wilder. The fire soars. The farmers now begin to dance. Michael expects the dancing to be amorphous and frantic, a helter-skelter flinging-out of arms and legs, but no: surprisingly, it is tight and disciplined, a controlled and formal series of movements. Men in this row, women in that; forward, back, interchange partners, elbows high, head thrown back, knees pumping, now hop, turn around, form lines again, link hands. The pace constantly aceelerating, but the rhythms always distinct and coherent. A ritualized progression of patterns. Eyes glazed, lips tight. This is no revel, he is suddenly aware, it is a religious festival. The rites of the commune people. What are they building toward? Is he the sacrificial lamb? Providence has sent them an urbmon man, eh? Panicky, he looks about for signs of a caldron, a spit, a stake, anything on which they might cook him. Tales of the commune circulate gaudily in the urbmon; he has always dismissed them as ignorant myths. But possibly not.

When they come for him, he decides, he will lunge and attack them. Better to be shot down

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quickly than to die on the village altar.

Yet half an hour passes and no one has even looked in the direction of his cell. The dancing has continued without a break. Oiled with sweat, the farmers seem like dream-figures, glittering, grotesque. Bare breasts bobbling; nostrils distended, eyes aglow. New boughs on the fire. The musicians goading one another into fresh frenzies. And now, what's this? Masked figures parading solemnly into the plaza: three men, three women. Faces hidden by intricate spherical constructions, nightmarish, bestial, garish. The women carry oval baskets in which can be seen products of the commune: seeds, dried ears of corn, ground meal. The men encircle a seventh person, a woman, two of them tugging at her arms and one pushing her from behind. She is pregnant, well along, into her sixth or even seventh month. She wears no mask, and her face is tense and rigid, the lips clamped, the eyes wide and frightened. They fling her down before the fire, and stand flanking her. She kneels, head drooping, long hair almost touching the ground, swollen breasts swaying with each ragged intake of breath. One of the masked men—it is impossible not to think of them as priests—intones a resonant invocation. One of the masked women places an ear of corn in each hand of the pregnant one. Another sprinkles her back with meal; it sticks to her sweaty skin. The third scatters seeds in her hair. The other two men join the chant. Michael, gripping the bars of his cell, feels as though he has been hurled thousands of years back in time, to some Neolithic festival; it is almost impossible for him to believe that one day's march from here rises the thousand-story bulk of Urban Monad 116.

THEY have finished anointing the pregnant woman with produce. Now two of the priests lift her, shaking, to a standing position, and one of the priestesses rips away her single garment. A howl from the villagers. They spin her around. Displaying her nakedness to all. The heavy protruding belly, drum-tight, glistening in the firelight. The broad hips and solid thighs, the meaty buttocks. Sensing something sinister just ahead, Michael presses his face against the bars, fighting off terror. Is she and not he the sacrificial victim? A flashing knife, the unborn fetus ripped from the womb, a devilish propitiation of the harvest gods? Please, no. Maybe he is to be the chosen executioner. His feverish imagination, unbidden, supplies the scenario: he sees himself taken from the cell, thrust into the plaza, a sickle pushed into his hand, the woman lying spreadeagled near the

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fire, belly upturned, the priests chanting, the priestesses leaping, and in pantomime they tell him what he must do, they indicate the taut curve of her body, draw their fingers across the preferred place of incision, while the music climbs toward insanity and the fire flares ever higher, and. No. No. He turns away, flinging one arm over his eyes. Shivering, nauseated. When he can bring himself to look again, he sees that the villagers are getting up and dancing toward the fire, toward the pregnant woman. She stands flatfooted, bewildered, clutching the ears of corn, pressing her thighs together, wriggling her shoulders in a way that somehow indicates she is shamed by her nudity. And they caper around her. Shouting raucous abuse. Making the four-fingered jab of contempt. Pointing, mocking, accusing. A condemned witch? An adulteress? The woman shrinks into herself. Suddenly the mob closes in on her. He sees them slapping her, pushing her, spitting at her. God bless, no! "Let her alone!" he screams. "You filthy grubbos, get your hands off her!" His wails are drowned by the music. A dozen or so farmers now ring the woman and they are shoving her back and forth. A double-handed push; she staggers, barely managing to stay upright, and stumbles across the ring, only to be seized by her breasts and slammed back the other way. She is panting, wild with terror, searching for escape, but the ring is tight, and they fling her around. When at last she drops, they tug her upright and toss her some more, grabbing her arms and whirling her from hand to hand around the ring. Then the circle opens. Other villagers sweep toward her. More abuse. The blows all are open-handed ones and no one seems to hit her belly—yet they are delivered with great force. A trickle of blood stains her chin and throat and one knee and one buttock are scraped raw from her having been knocked to the ground. She is limping, too; she must have turned an ankle. Vulnerable as she is in her nakedness, she makes no attempt to defend herself or even to protect her pregnancy. Clutching the ears of corn, she simply accepts her torment, letting herself be hurled about, allowing the vindictive hands to poke and pinch and slap her. The mob surges about her, everyone having a turn. How much more can she take? Is the idea to beat her to death? To make her drop her baby while they watch? He has never imagined anything so chilling. He feels the blows as if they were landing on his own body. If he could he would strike these people dead with thunderbolts. Where is their respect for life? That woman should be sacred. Instead they torture her.

She vanishes under a horde of screaming attackers.

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When they clear away, a minute or two later, she is kneeling, half conscious, close to collapse. Her lips writhe in hysterical, choking sobs. Her entire body is trembling. Her head hangs forward. Someone's clawed hand has left a series of parallel bloody tracks across the globe of her right breast. She is smudged everywhere with dirt.

The music grows oddly soft, as if some climax were approaching and momentum had to be gained. *Now they come for me,* Michael thinks. *Now I'm supposed to kill her or top her or kick her in the belly or god knows what.* But no one even looks toward the building in which he is jailed. The three priests are chanting in unison; the music gains gradually in intensity; the villagers fall back, clustering along the perimeter of the plaza. And the woman rises, shakily, uncertainly. She looks down at her bloodied and battered self. Her face wholly blank; she is beyond pain, beyond shame, beyond terror. Slowly she walks toward the fire. Stumbles once. Recovers, stays upright. Now she stands at the edge of the fire, almost within reach of the licking tongues of flame. Her back to him. Plump heavy rump, deeply dimpled. Scratches on her back. Wide pelvis, the bones spreading out as the little's time approaches. The music is deafening now. The priests silent, frozen. Obviously the great moment. Does she leap into the flames?

No. Raises her arms. The ears of corn outlined against the brightness of the fire. Throws them in: two quick flares and they vanish. An immense roar from the villagers, a tremendous crashing discord from the musicians. The naked woman stumbles away from the fire, tottering, exhausted. Falls, landing with a thump on her left haunch, lies there sobbing. Priests and priestesses march into the darkness with stiff, pompous strides. The villagers simply fade away, leaving only the woman crumpled in the plaza. And a man coming toward her, a tall, bearded figure; Michael remembers seeing him in the midst of the mob when they were beating her. Lifts her now. Cradles her tenderly against him. Kisses her scratched breast. Runs his hand lightly over her belly, as though assuring himself that the child is unharmed. She clings close. He talks softly to her; the alien words drift across to Michael's cell. She replies, stammering, her voice thick with shock. Unbothered by her weight, the man sweeps her into his arms and slowly carries her away, toward one of the buildings on the opposite side of the plaza. All is still, now. Only the fire remains, crackling harshly, crumbling in upon itself. When, after a long while, no one appears Michael turns away from his window and, stunned, baffled, throws

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himself on his blankets. Silence. Darkness. Images of the bizarre ceremony churn in his mind. He shivers; he trembles; he feels almost at the edge of tears. Finally he sleeps.

III

THE arrival of breakfast awakens him. He studies the tray a few minutes before forcing himself to get up. Stiff and sore from yesterday's walking; every muscle protesting. Doubled up, he hobbles to the window: a heap of ashes where the fire had been, villagers moving about on their morning chores, the farming machines already heading toward the fields. He splashes water in his face, voids his wastes, looks automatically for the cleanser and, not finding it, begins to wonder how he will tolerate the crust of grime that has accumulated on his skin. He had not realized before how ingrained a habit it was for him to get under the ultrasonic wave at the beginning of each day. He goes then to the tray: juice, bread, cold fruit, wine. It will do. Before he is finished eating, his cell door comes in and a woman enters, clad in the usual brief commune costume. He knows instinctively that she is someone of importance; her eyes have the clear cold light of authority, and her expression is an intelligent, perceptive one. She is perhaps thirty years old and, like most of these farming women's, her body is lean and taut, with supple muscles, long limbs, small breasts. She reminds him in some ways of Micaela, although her hair is auburn and close-cropped, not long and black. A weapon is strapped to her left thigh.

"Cover yourself," she says briskly. "I don't welcome the sight of your nakedness. Cover yourself and then we can talk."

She speaks the urbmon tongue! A strange accent, true, with every word cut short as if her sharp shining teeth have clipped its tail as it passes her lips. The vowels blurred and distorted. But unmistakably the language of his native building. Immense relief. Communication at last.

He pulls on his clothing hastily. She watches him, stony-faced. A tough one, she is. He says, "In the urbmons we don't worry much about covering our bodies. We live in what we call a post-privacy culture. I didn't realize—"

"You don't happen to be in an urbmon just now."

"I realize that. I'm sorry if I've given offense through my ignorance of your customs."

He is fully dressed. She seems to soften a bit, perhaps at his apology, perhaps merely because he has concealed his nudity. Taking a few steps farther into the room, she says, "It's a long time since we've had a spy from your people among us."

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"I'm not a spy."

A cool, skeptical smile. "No? Then why are you here?"

"I didn't intend to trespass on your commune's land. I was just passing through, heading eastward. On my way toward the sea."

"Really?" As though he had said he had set out to walk to Pluto. "Traveling alone, are you?"

"I am."

"When did this marvelous journey begin?"

"Yesterday morning, very early," Michael says. "I'm from Urban Monad 116. A computer primer, if that means anything to you. Suddenly I felt I couldn't stay inside that building any more, that I had to find out what the outside world was like, so I arranged to get an egress pass, slipped out just before dawn and started walking. I came to your fields and you machines saw me, I guess, and I was picked up. Because of the language problem I couldn't explain to anyone who I—"

"What do you hope to gain by spying on us?"

His shoulders slump. "I told you," he says wearily. "I'm not a spy."

Urbmon people don't slip out of their buildings. I've dealt with your kind for years; I know how your minds work." Her eyes level with his. Cold, cold. "You'd be paralyzed with terror five minutes after you set out," she assures him. "Obviously you've been trained for this mission or you'd never have been able to keep your sanity for a full day in the fields. What I don't understand is why they'd send you. You have your world and we have ours. There's no conflict, no overlapping. There's no need for espionage."

"I agree," Michael says. "And that's why I'm not a spy." He finds himself drawn to her despite the severity of her attitude. Her competence and self-confidence attract him. And if she would only smile she would be quite beautiful. He says, "Look, how can I get you to believe this? I just wanted to see the world outside the urbmon. All my life indoors. Never smelling fresh air, never feeling the sun on my skin. Thousands of people living on top of me. I'm not really well adjusted to urbmon society, I discovered. So I went outside. Not a spy. All I want to do is travel. To the sea, particularly. Have you ever seen the sea? No? That's my dream—to walk along the shore, to hear the waves rolling in, to feel the wet sand under my feet—"

POSSIBLY the fervor in his tone is beginning to convince her. She shrugs, looking less flinty, and says, "What's your name?"

"Michael Statler."

"Age?"

"Twenty-three."

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"We could put you aboard the next courier pod—with the fungus shipment. You'd be back at your urbmon in half an hour."

"No," he says softly. "Don't do that. Just let me keep going east. I'm not ready to go back so soon."

"Haven't gathered enough information, you mean?"

"I told you, I'm not—" He stops, realizing she is teasing him.

"All right. Maybe you aren't a spy. Just a madman, perhaps." She smiles for the first time and slides down until she is squatting against the wall, facing him. In an easy conversational tone she says, "What do you think of our village, Statler?"

"I don't even know where to begin answering that."

"How do we strike you? Simple? Complicated? Evil? Frightening? Unusual?"

"Strange," he says.

"Strange in comparison to the kind of people you've lived among, or just strange, absolutely?"

"I'm not sure I know the distinction. It's like another world out here, anyway. I—I—what's your name, by the way?"

"Artha."

"Arthur? Among us that's a man's name."

"A-R-T-H-A."

"Oh. Artha. How interesting. How beautiful." He knots his fingers tightly. "The way you live so close to the soil here, Artha. There's something dreamlike about that for me. These little houses. The plaza. Seeing you walking around in the open. The sun. Building fires. Not having any upstairs or downstairs. And that business last night, the music, the pregnant woman. What was that all about?"

"You mean the unbirth dance?"

"Is *that* what it was? Some kind of—" he falters—"sterility rite?"

"To insure a good harvest," Artha says. "To keep the crops healthy and childbirths low. We have rules about breeding, you understand."

"And the woman everybody was hitting—she got pregnant illegally, is that it?"

"Oh, no." Artha laughs. "Milcha's child is quite legal."

"Then why—tormenting her like that—she could have lost the child—"

"Someone had to do it," Artha tells him. "The commune has eleven pregnants, just now. They drew lots and Milcha lost. Or won. It isn't punishment, Statler. It's a religious thing: she's the celebrant, the holy scapegoat, the—the—I don't have the words in your language. Through her suffering she brings health and prosperity upon the commune. Insuring that no unwanted children will come into our women, that all will remain in perfect balance. Of course, it's painful for her. And there's the shame, being naked in front of

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everyone. But it has to be done. It's a great honor. Milcha will never have to do it again and she'll have certain privileges for the rest of her life. And of course everyone is grateful to her for accepting our blows. Now we're protected for another year."

"Protected?"

"Against the anger of the gods."

"Gods," he says quietly. Swallowing the word and trying to comprehend it. After a moment he asks, "Why do you try to avoid having children?"

"Do you think we own the world?" she replies, her eyes abruptly fiery. "We have our commune. Our allotted zone of land. We must make food for ourselves and also for the urbmons, right? What would happen to you if we simply bred and bred and bred—until our village sprawled out over half of the present fields and such remaining food as we produced was merely enough for our own needs? With nothing to spare for you. Children must be housed. Houses occupy land. How can we farm land covered by a house? We must set limits."

"But you don't need to sprawl your village out into the fields. You could build upward. As we do. And increase your numbers tenfold without taking up any more land area. Well, of course, you'd need more food and there'd be less to ship to us, but—"

"You absolutely don't understand," Artha snaps. "Should we turn our commune into an urbmon? You have your way of life; we have ours. Ours requires us to be few in number and live in the midst of fertile fields. Why should we become like you? We pride ourselves *not* being like you. So if we expand we must expand horizontally, right? Which would in time cover the surface of the world with a dead crust of paved streets and roads, as in the former days. No. We are beyond such things. We impose limits on ourselves and live in the proper rhythm of our way—and we are happy. And so it shall be forever with us. Does this seem so wicked? We think the urbmon folk are wicked, for they will not control their breeding. And even encourage breeding."

"There's no need for us to control it," he tells her. "It's been mathematically proven that we haven't begun to exhaust the possibilities of the planet. Our population could double or even triple —and as long as we continue to live in vertical cities, in urban monads, there'd be room for everyone. Without encroaching on productive farmland. We build a new urbmon every few years and even so the food supplies aren't diminishing, the rhythm of *our* way holds up and—"

"Do you think this can continue infinitely?"

"Well, no, not infinitely,"

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Michael concedes. "But for a long time. Five hundred years, maybe, at the present rate of increase, before we're feeling any squeeze."

"And then?"

"They can solve that problem when the time comes."

Artha shakes her head furiously. "No! No! How can you say such a thing? To go on breeding, letting the future worry about it—"

"Look," he says, "I've talked to my brother-in-law, who's a historian. Specializes in the twentieth century. Back then it was believed that everybody would starve if the world's population got past five or six billion. Much talk of a population crisis, etc. etx. Well, then came the collapse and afterward things were reorganized. The first urbmons went up, the old horizontal pattern of land use was prohibited and guess what? We found there was room for *ten* billion people. And then twenty. And then fifty. And now seventy-five. Taller buildings, more efficient food production, greater concentration of people on the unproductive land. So who are we to say that our descendants won't continue to cope with expanding population on up to five hundred billion, a thousand billion—who knows? The twentieth century wouldn't have believed it was possible to support this many people on Earth. So if we worry in advance about a problem that may in fact never cause any trouble, if we unblessworthily thwart god by limiting births, we sin against life without any assurance that—"

"Pah!" Artha snorts. "You will never understand us. And I suppose we will never understand you." Rising, she strides toward the door. "Tell me this, then. If the urbmon way is so wonderful, why did you slip away and come wandering in our fields?" And she does not stay for an answer. The door clicks behind her; he goes to it and finds that she has locked it. He is alone. And still a prisoner.

A LONG drab day. No one comes to him, except the girl bringing lunch: in and out. The stench of the cell oppresses him. The lack of a cleanser becomes unbearable; he imagines that the filth gathering on his skin is pitting and corroding it. From his narrow window he watches the life of the commune, craning his neck to see it all. The farming machines coming and going. The husky peasants loading sacks of produce aboard a conveyor belt disappearing into the ground—going, no doubt, to the courier-pod system that carries food to the urbmons and industrial goods to the communes. Last night's scapegoat, Milcha, passes by, limping, bruised, apparently exempt from work today; villagers hail her with obvious reverence. She smiles and pats her belly. He does not see Artha at

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all. Why do they not release him? He is fairly certain that he has convinced her he is no spy. And in any case can hardly harm the commune. Yet here he remains as the afternoon fades. The busy people outside, sweating, suntanned, purposeful. He sees only a speck of the commune: outside the scope of his vision there must be schools, a theater, a governmental building, warehouses, repair shops. Images of last night's unbirth dance glow morbidly in his memory. The barbarism; the wild music; the agony of the woman. But he knows that it is an error to think of these farmers as primitive, simple folk, despite such things. They seem bizarre to him but their savagery is only superficial, a mask they don to set themselves apart from the urban people. This is a complex society held in a delicate balance. As complex as is his own. Sophisticated machinery to care for. Doubtless a computer center somewhere, controlling the planting and tending and harvesting of the crops—the operation requires a staff of skilled technicians. Biological needs to consider: pesticides, weed-suppression, all the ecological intricacies. And the problems of the barter system that ties the commune to the urbmons. He perceives only the surface of this place, he realizes.

In late afternoon Artha returns to his cell.

"Will they let me go soon?" he asks immediately.

She shakes her head. "It's under discussion. I've recommended your release. But some of them are very suspicious people."

"Who do you mean?"

"The chiefs. You know, they're old men, most of them, with a natural mistrust of strangers. A couple of them want to sacrifice you to the harvest god."

"Sacrifice?"

Artha grins. There is nothing stony about her now; she is relaxed, clearly friendly. On his side. "It sounds horrid, doesn't it? But it's been known to happen. Our gods occasionally demand lives. Don't you ever take life in the urbmon?"

"When someone threatens the stability of our society, yes," he admits. "Lawbreakers go down the chute. Into the combustion chambers at the bottom of the building. Contributing their body mass to our energy output. But—"

"So you kill for the sake of keeping everything running smoothly. Well, sometimes so do we. Not often. I don't really think they'll kill you. But it isn't decided yet."

"When will it be?"

"Perhaps tonight. Or tomorrow."

"How can I represent any threat to the commune?"

"No one says you do," Artha

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tells him. "Even so, to offer the life of an urbmon man may have positive values here. Increasing our blessings. It's a philosophical thing, not easy to explain: the urbmons are the ultimate consumers and if our harvest god symbolically consumed an urbmon instead, in a metaphorical way, taking you to stand for the whole society you come from, it would be a mystic affirmation of the unity of the two societies, the link that binds commune to urbmon and urbmon to commune and—oh, never mind. Maybe they'll forget about it. It's only the day after the unbirth dance; we don't need any more sacred protection so soon. I've told them that. I'd say your chances of going free are fairly good."

"Fairly good," he repeats gloomily. "Wonderful." The distant sea. The ashy cone of Vesuvius. Jerusalem. The Taj Mahal. As far away as the stars, now. The sea. The sea. This stinking cell. He chokes on despair.

Artha tries to cheer him. Squatting close beside him on the tipsy floor. Her eyes warm, affectionate. Her earlier military brusqueness gone. She seems fond of him. Getting to know him better as if she has surmounted the barrier of cultural differences that made him seem so alien to her before. And he the same with her. The separations dwindling. Her world is not his but he thinks he could adjust to some of its unfamiliar assumptions. Strike up a closeness. He's a man, she's a woman, right? The basics. All the rest is facade. But as they talk he is plunged again and again into new awarenesses of how different she is from him, he from her. He asks her about herself and she says she is unmarried. Stunned, he tells her that there are no unmarried people in the urbmons past the age of twelve or thirteen. She says she is thirty-one. Why has someone so attractive never married? "We have enough married women here," she replies. "I had no reason to marry." Does she not want to bear children? No, not at all. The commune has its allotted number of mothers. She has other responsibilities ot occupy her. "Such as?" She explains that she is part of the liaison staff handling urbmon commerce. Which is why she can speak the language so well; she deals frequently with the urbmons, arranging for exchanges of produce for manufactured goods, setting up servicing arrangements whenever the commune's machinery suffers a breakdown beyond the skills of the village technicians—and so forth, "I may have monitored your calls occasionally," he says. "Some of the nodes I prime run through the procurement level. If I ever get back home, I'll listen for you, Artha." Her smile is dazzling. He begins to suspect that love is blossoming in this cell.

She asks him about the urbmon.

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SHE has never been inside one; all her contacts with the urban monads come via communications channels. A vast curiosity is evident in her. She wants him to describe the residential apartments, the transport system, liftshafts and dropshafts, the schools, the recreational facilities. Who prepares the food? Who decides what professions the children will follow? Can you move from one city to another? Where do you keep all the new people? How do you manage not to hate each other, when you must live so close together? Don't you feel like prisoners? Thousands of you milling about like bees in a hive—how do you stand it? And the stale air, the pale artificial light, the separation from the natural world. Incomprehensible to her: such a narrow, compressed life. And he tries to tell her about the urbmon, how even he, who chose to flee from it, really loves it. The subtle balance of need and want in it, the elaborate social system designed for minimal friction and frustration, the sense of community within one's own city and village, the glorification of parenthood, the colossal mechanical minds in the service core that keep the delicate interplay of urban rhythms coordinated—he makes the building seem a poem of human relationships, a miracle of civilized harmonies. His words soar. Artha seems captivated. He goes on and on, in a kind of rapture of narrative, describing toilet facilities, sleeping arrangements, screens and data terminals, the recycling and reprocessing of urine and feces, the combustion of solid refuse, the auxiliary generators that produce electrical power from accumulated surplus body heat, the air vents and circulation system, the social complexity of the building's different levels, maintenance people here, industrial workers there, scholars, entertainers, engineers, computer technicians, administrators. The senior citizen dorms, the newlywed dorms, the marriage customs, the sweet tolerance of others, the sternly enforced commandment against selfishness. Artha nods and fills in words for him when he leaves a sentence half-finished to hurry on to the next and her face grows flushed with excitement, as if she, too, were caught up in the lyricism of his account of the building. Seeing for the first time in her life that it is not necessarily brutal and antihuman to pack hundreds of thousands of people into a single structure in which they spend their entire lives. As he speaks he wonders whether he is not letting himself be carried away by his own rhetoric; the words rushing from him must make him sound like an impassioned propagandist for a way of life about which, after all, he had come to have serious doubts. But yet he goes on describing and, by

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implication, praising the urbmon. He will not condemn. There was no other way for humanity to develop. The necessity of the vertical city. The beauty of the urbmon. Its wondrous complexity, its intricate texture. Yes, of course, there is beauty outside it, he admits that—he has gone in search of it—but it is folly to think that the urbmon itself is something loathsome, something to be deplored. In its own way magnificent. The unique solution to the population crisis. Heroic response to immense challenge. And he thinks he is getting through to her. This shrewd, cool commune woman, raised under the hot sun. His verbal intoxication transforms itself into something explicity sexual now: he is communicating with Artha, he is reaching her mind, they are coming together in a way that neither of them would have thought possible yesterday, and he interprets this new closeness as a physical thing. The natural eroticism of the urbmon-dweller: everyone accessible to everyone else at all times. Confirm their closeness by the direct embrace. It seems like the most reasonable extension of their communion, from the conversational to the copulatory. So close already. Her eyes shining. Her small breasts. Reminding him of Micaela. He leans toward her. Left hand slipping around her shoulders, fingers groping for and finding her nearer breast. Cupping it. Nuzzles the line of her jaw with his lips, going toward her earlobe. His other hand at her waist. seeking the secret of her one garment. In a moment she'll be naked. His body against hers, approaching congruency. Cunning, experienced fingers opening the way for his thrust. And then.

"No. Stop."

"You don't mean that, Artha." Loosening the glossy red wrap now. Clutching the hard little breast. Hunting for her mouth. "You're all tensed up. Why not relax? Loving is blessworthy. Loving is—"

"Stop it."

Flinty again. A sharp-edged command. Suddenly struggling in his arms.

Is this the commune mode of lovemaking? The pretense of resistance? She grasps at her wrap, pushes him with her elbow, tries to bring up her knee. He surrounds her with his arms and attempts to press her to the floor. Still caressing. Kissing. Murmuring her name.

"Get *off.*"

This is a wholly new experience for him. A reluctant woman, all sinews and bone, fighting his advances. In the urbmon she could be put to death for this. Unblessworthy thwarting of a fellow citizen. But this is not the urbmon. This is not the urbmon. Her struggles inflame him; as it is he has gone several days without a wom-

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an, the longest span of abstinence he can remember, and he is stiff, agonizingly erect, carrying a blazing sword. No finesse possible; he wants in, as quickly as it can be managed. "Artha. Artha. Artha." Primordial grunts. Her body pinned beneath him. The wrap off; as they fight he catches a glimpse of slender thighs, matted auburn delta. The flat girlish belly of the unchilded. If he can only get his own clothes off somehow, while holding her down. Fighting like a demon. Good thing she wasn't wearing her weapon when she came in. Watch out, the eyes! Panting and gasping. A wild flurry of hammering fists. The salty taste of blood on his split lip. He looks into her eyes and is appalled. Her rigid, murderous gaze. The harder she fights, the more he wants her. A savage! If this is how she fights, how will she love? She starts to scream; he gets his mouth down on her lips; her teeth hunt for his flesh. Fingernails clawing his back. She is surprisingly strong. "Artha," he begs, "don't fight me. This is insanity. If you'll only—"

"Animal!"

"Let me show you how much I love—"

"Lunatic!"

Her knee suddenly in his crotch. He pivots, avoiding the worst of her attack, but she hurts him anyway. This is no coy game. If he wants to have her he must break her strength. Immobilize her. Raping an unconscious woman? No. No. It has all gone wrong. Sadness overwhelms him. His lust suddenly subsides. He rolls free of her and kneels near the window, looking at the floor, breathing hard. Go on, tell the old men what I did. Feed me to your god. Naked, standing above him, she sullenly dons her wrap. The harsh sound of her breathing. He says, "In an urbmon, when someone makes sexual advances it's considered highly improper to refuse him." His voice hollow with shame. "I was attracted to you, Artha. I thought you were to me. And then it was too late for me to stop myself."

"What animals you all must be!"

Unable to meet her eyes. "In context, it makes sense. We can't allow explosive frustration-situations. No room for conflicts in an urbmon. But here—it's different, is it?"

"Very."

"Can you forgive me?"

"We couple with those we deeply love," she says. "We don't open for anyone at all who asks. Nor is it a simple thing. There are rituals of approach. Intermediaries must be employed. Great complications. But how could you have known all that?"

"Exactly. How could I?"

Her voice whiplashing with irritation and exasperation. "We were getting along so well! Why did you have to touch me?"

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"You said it yourself. I didn't know. I didn't know. The two of us together—I could feel the attraction growing—it was so natural for me to reach out—"

"And it was so natural for you to try to rape me—"

"I stopped in time, didn't I?"

A bitter laugh. "So to speak. If you call that stopping. If you call that in time."

"Resistance isn't an easy thing for me to understand, Artha. I thought you were playing a game with me. I didn't realize at first that you were refusing me." Looking up at her now. Her eyes holding mingled contempt and sorrow. "It was all a misunderstanding, Artha. Can't we turn time back half an hour? Can't we try to put things together again?"

"I will remember your hands on my body. I will remember your making me naked."

"Don't carry a grudge. Try to look at it from my point of view. The cultural gulf between us. A different set of assumptions in operation. I—"

She shakes her head slowly. No hope of forgiveness.

"Artha—"

She goes out. He sits alone in the dusk. An hour later his dinner comes. Night descends; he eats with no interest in his food, nursing his bitterness. Engulfed by shame. Although he insists he was not entirely at fault. A clash of irreconcilable cultures. It was so natural for him. It was so natural. And the sadness. Thinking of how close they had come to be before it happened. How close.

IV

SEVERAL hours after sundown they begin building a new bonfire in the plaza. He watches gloomily. She has gone to the village elders, then, to tell them of his attack on her. An outrage; they console her and promise vengeance. Now they will surely sacrifice him to their god. His last night of life. All the turmoil of his existence converging on this day. No one to grant a final wish. He'll die miserably, his body unclean. Far from home. So young. Jangling with unfulfilled desires. Never to see the sea.

And what's this, now? A farming machine being trundled up close to the fire, a giant upright thing, five meters high, with eight long, jointed arms, six many-kneed legs, a vast mouth. Some kind of harvester, maybe. Its polished brown metallic skin reflecting the fire's leaping red fingers. Like a mighty idol. Moloch. Baal. He sees his body swept aloft in the great clutching fingers. His head nearing the metal mouth. The villagers capering about him in rhythmic frenzy. Bruised swollen Milcha chanting ecstatically as he goes to his doom. Icy Artha rejoicing in her triumph. Her purity

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restored by his sacrifice. The priests droning. Please, no. No. Perhaps he's all wrong. Last night, the sterility rite, he thought they were punishing the pregnant one. And she was really the most honored one. But how vicious that machine looks! How deadly!

The plaza is full of villagers now. A major event.

Listen, Artha, it was merely a misunderstanding. I thought you desired me. I was acting within the context of my society's mores, can't you see that? Sex isn't a big complicated operatic thing with us. It's like exchanging smiles. Like touching hands. When two people are together and there's an attraction they do it, because why not? I only wanted to give you pleasure, really. We were getting along so well together. Really.

The sound of drums. The awful skirling screeches of out-of-tune wind instruments. Orgiastic dancing is starting. God bless, I want to live! Here are the priests and priestesses in their nightmare masks. No doubt of it, the full routine. And I'm the central spectacle tonight.

An hour passes and the scene in the plaza grows more frenzied, but no one comes to fetch him. Has he misunderstood again? Does tonight's ritual actually concern him as little as did the one last night?

A sound at his door. He hears the lock turning. The door opens. The priests must be coming for him. So now the end is near, eh? He braces himself, hoping for a painless finish. To die for metaphorical reasons, to become a mystic link binding commune to urbmon—such a fate seems improbable and unreal to him. But it is about to befall him all the same.

Artha enters the cell.

She closes the door quickly and presses her back against it. The only illumination is the streaming firelight glaring through his window; it shows her to him, her face tense and stern, her body rigid. This time she wears her weapon. Taking no chances.

"Artha! I—"

"Quiet. If you want to live, keep your voice down."

"What's happening out there?"

"They prepare the harvest god."

"For me?"

"For you."

He nods. "You told them I tried to rape you, I suppose. And now my punishment. All right. All right. It isn't fair, but who expects fairness?"

"I told them nothing," she says. "It was their decision, taken at sundown. I did not cause this."

She sounds sincere. He wonders.

She goes on: "They will take you before the god at midnight. Just now they are praying that he will receive you gracefully. It is a lengthy prayer." She walks cautiously past him, as if expecting him to pounce on her again, looks through the window. Nods to her-

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self. Turns. "Very well. No one will notice. Come with me and make no sound whatever. If I'm caught with you, I'll have to kill you and say you were trying to escape. Otherwise it'll be my life too. Come. Come."

"Where?"

"Come!" A fierce impatient whispered gust:

She leads him from the cell. In wonder he follows her through a labyrinth of passages, through dank subterranean chambers, through tunnels barely wider than himself. They emerge finally at the back of the building. He shivers: a chill in the night air. Music and chanting floating toward him from the plaza. Artha gestures, runs out between two houses, looks in all directions, gestures again. He runs after her. By quick nervous stages they reach the outer edge of the commune. He glances back; from here he can see the fire, the idol, the tiny dancing figures, like images on a screen. Ahead of him are the fields. Above him the crescent sliver of the moon, the shining sprawl of the stars. A sudden sound. Artha clutches at him and tugs him down, under a clump of shrubs. Her body against his; the tips of her breasts like points of fire. He does not dare to move or speak. Someone goes by: a sentry, maybe. Broad back, thick neck. Out of sight. Artha, trembling, holds his wrists, keeping him down. Then at last getting up. Nodding. Silently saying the way is clear. She slips into the fields, between the burgeoning rows of tall, leafy plants. For perhaps ten minutes they trot away from the village, until his untrained body is gasping for breath. When she halts, the bonfire is only a stain on the distant horizon and the singing is drowned out by the chirping of insects. "From here you go by yourself," she tells him. "I have to return. If anyone misses me for long, they might suspect."

"Why did you do this?"

"Because I was unjust to you," she says and manages to smile. A ghost-smile, a quick flicker, the merest specter of the warmth of the afternoon. "You were drawn to me. There was no way for you to know our attitudes about such things. I was cruel, I was hateful —and you were only trying to show love. I'm sorry, Statler. So this is my atonement. Go."

"If I could tell you how grateful—"

His hand lightly touches her arm. He feels her quiver—in desire, in disgust, what? On a sudden impulse he pulls her into an embrace. She is taut at first, then melting. Lips to lips. His fingers on her bare muscular back. Do I dare touch her breasts? Her belly pressed to his. He has a quick wild vision of this afternoon's breach healed: Artha sinking gladly to the sweet earth here, drawing

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him down on her and into her, the union of their bodies creating that metaphorical link between urbmon and commune that the elders would have forged with his blood. But no. It is an unrealistic vision, however satisfying artistically. There will be no coupling in the moonlit field. Artha lives by her code. Obviously these thoughts have passed through her mind in these few seconds, and she has considered and rejected the possibilities of a passionate farewell, for now she slides free of him, severing the contact moments before he can capitalize on her partial surrender. Her eyes bright and loving in the darkness. Her smile awkward and divided. "Go, now," she whispers. Turning. Running back a dozen paces toward the commune. Turning again, gesticulating with the flats of her hands, trying to push him into motion. "Go. *Go.* What are you standing there for?"

HURRIEDLY through the moonsilvered night. Stumbling, lurching, tripping. He does not bother to pick a cautious route between the rows of growing things; in his haste he tramples plants, pushes them aside, leaves a swath of destruction by which, come dawn, he could readily be traced. He knows he must get out of the commune's territory before morning. Once the crop-sprayers are aloft they can easily find him and bring him back to feed him to thwarted Moloch. Possibly they will send the sprayers out by night to hunt for him, as soon as they find that he has escaped. Do those yellow eyes see in the dark? He halts and listens for the horrid droning sound but all is still. And the farming machines—will they go forth to track him down? He has to hurry. Presumably if he gets beyond the commune's domain he will be safe from the worshipers of the harvest god.

Where shall he go?

There is only one destination conceivable now. Looking toward the horizon, he sees the awesome columns of the Chipitts urbmons, eight or ten of them visible from here as brilliant beacons, thousands of windows ablaze. He cannot pick out individual windows but he is aware of constant shiftings and flowings in the patterns of light as switches go on and off. The middle of the evening there. Concerts, somatic contests, glowduels, all the nightly amusements in full swing. Stacion sitting home, fearful, wondering about him. How long has he been gone? Two days, three? All blurred. The littles crying. Micaela distraught, probably quarreling mercilessly with Jason to ease her tension. While here he is, many kilometers away, newly fled from a world of idols and rites, of pagan dancing, of unyielding and infertile women. Mud on his shoes, stubble on his

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cheeks. He must look awful and smell worse. No access to a cleanser. What bacteria now breed in his flesh? He must go back. His muscles ache so desperately that he has passed into a discomfort beyond mere fatigue. The reek of the cell clings to his nostrils. His tongue feels furry and puffed. He imagines that his skin is cracking from exposure to sun, moon, air.

What of the sea? What of Vesuvius and the Taj Mahal?

Not this time. He is willing to admit defeat. He has gone as far as he dares, and for as much time as he can permit himself; now with all his soul he longs for home. His conditioning asserting itself after all. Environment conquering genetics. He has had his adventure; some day, god willing, he will have

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another; but his fantasy of crossing the continent, slipping from commune to commune, must be abandoned. Too many idols wait with polished jaws and he may not be lucky enough to find an Artha in the next village. Home, then.

HIS fear ebbs as the hours pass. No one and nothing pursue him. He slips into a steady, mechanical rhythm of march, step and step and step and step, hauling himself robotlike toward the vast towers of the urban monads. He has no idea of what time it is but he supposes it must be past midnight; the moon has swung far across the sky and the urbmons have grown dimmer as people go to sleep. Nightwalkers now prowl there. Siegmund Kluver of Shang-

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hai dropping in to see Micaela, maybe. Jason on his way to his grubbo sweethearts in Warsaw or Prague. Another few hours, Michael supposes, and he will be home. It took him only from sunrise to late afternoon to reach the commune and that was with much circuitous rambling; with the towers rising before him at all times he will have no difficulty going straight to his goal.

All is silence. The starry night has a magical beauty. He almost regrets his decision to return to the urbmon. Under the crystalline sky he feels the pull of nature. After perhaps four hours of walking he stops to bathe in an irrigation canal and emerges naked and refreshed; washing with water is not as satisfying as getting under the ultrasonic cleanser but at least he no longer needs to be obsessed with the layers of grime and corruption clinging to his skin. More springily, now, he strides along. His adventure already is receding into history: he encapsulates it and retrospectively relives it. How good to have done this. Tasting the fresh air, the dawn's mist, dirt under his fingernails. Even his imprisonment now seems a high excitement rather than an imposition. Watching the unbirth dance. His fitful, unconsummated love for Artha. Their struggle and their dreamlike reconciliation. The gaping jaws of the idol. The fear of death. His escape. What man of Urbmon 116 has done such things?

This access of self-congratulation gives him strength that sends him plunging on across the commune's unending fields in renewed vigor. Only the urbmons seem to be getting no closer. A trick of perspective. His weary eyes. Is he heading, he wonders, toward 116? It would be a sad prank of topography to get turned about and come into the urban constellation at 140 or 145 or so. If, say, he is moving at an angle to his true course, the divergence could be immense by the end of his march, leaving him with a dreadful numbing hypotenuse to traverse. He has no way of knowing which of the urbmons ahead of him is his own. He simply goes onward.

The moon vanishes. The stars fade. Dawn is creeping in.

He has reached the zone of unused land between the commune's rim and the Chipitts constellation. His legs are ablaze but he forces himself on. So close to the buildings that they seem to hang, unsupported, in midair. The formal gardens in view. Robot gardeners serenely going about their trade. Blossoms opening to the first light of day. Perfume drifting on the soft breeze. Home. Home. Stacion. Micaela. Get some rest before going back on the interface. Find a plausible excuse.

Which is Urbmon 116?

The towers bear no numbers. Those who live inside them know

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where they live. Half-staggering, Michael approaches the nearest building. Its flanks illuminated with radiant dawnlight. Looking up a thousand floors. The delicacy, the complexity, of its myriad tiny chambers. Beneath him the mysterious underground roots, the power plants, the waste-processing plants, the hidden computers, all the concealed wonders that give the urbmon its life. And above, rising like some immense vegetable growth, its sides marvelously intricate, a hatchwork of textures, the urbmon. Within the hundreds of thousands of interwoven lives, artists and scholars, musicians and sculptors, welders and janitors. His eyes are moist. Home. Home. But is it? He goes to the hatch. Holds up his wrist, shows the egress pass. The computer is authorized to admit him on demand. "If this is Urbmon 116, open up! I'm Michael Statler." Nothing is happening. Scanners scan him but all stays sealed. "What building is this?" he asks. Silence. "Come on," he says. "Tell me where I am!"

A voice from an invisible speaker says, "This is Urban Monad One-twenty-three of the Chipitts constellation."

123! So many kilometers from home!

But he can only continue. Now the sun is above the horizon and turning quickly from red to gold. If that is the east, then where is Urbmon 116? He calculates with a numbed mind. He must go east. Yes? No? He plods through the interminable series of gardens separating 123 from its eastern neighbor and interrogates the speaker at the hatch. Yes: this is Urbmon 122. He proceeds. The buildings are set at long diagonals, so that one will not shade the next, and he moves down the center of the constellation, keeping careful count, while the sun climbs and swarms over him. Dizzy, now, with hunger and exhaustion. Is this 116? No, he must have lost count; it will not open for him. Then this?

YES. The hatch slides back as he offers his pass. Michael clambers in. Waiting as the door rolls shut behind him. Now the inner door to open. Waiting. Well? "Why don't you open?" he asks. "Here. Here. Scan this." Holding up his pass. Perhaps some kind of decontamination procedure. No telling what he's brought in from outside. And now the door opens.

Lights in his eyes. A dazzling glare. "Remain where you are. Make no attempt to leave the entryway." The cold metallic voice nailing him where he stands. Blinking, Michael takes half a step forward, then realizes it might be unwise and stops. A sweet-smelling cloud engulfs him. They have sprayed him with something. Con-

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gealing fast, forming a security cocoon. The lights now go down. Figures blocking his path: four, five of them. Police. "Michael Statler?" one of them asks.

"I have a pass," he says uncertainly. "It's all quite legitimate. You can check the records. I—"

"Under arrest. Alteration of program, illicit departure from building, undesirable harboring of countersocial tendencies. Orders to immobilize you immediately upon your return to building. Now carried out. Mandatory sentence of erasure to follow."

"Wait a minute. I have the right of appeal, don't I?"

"Case has already been considered and referred to us for final disposition." A note of inexorability in the policeman's tone. They are at his sides now. He cannot move. Sealed within the hardening spray. Whatever alien microorganisms he has collected are sealed in it with him. To the chute? No. No. Please. But what else did he expect? What other outcome could there be? Did he think he had fooled the urbmon? Can you repudiate an entire civilization and hope to slip yourself smoothly back into it? They have loaded him aboard some kind of dolly. Dim shapes outside the cocoon. "Let's get a detailed print of this on the record, boys. Move him toward the scanners. Yes. That's it."

"Can't I see my wife, at least? My sister? I mean, what harm will it do if I just talk to them one last time—"

"Menace to harmony and stability, dangerous countersocial tendencies, immediate removal from environment to prevent spreading of reactive pattern." As though he carried a plague of rebelliousness. He has seen this before: the summary judgment, the instant execution. And never really understood. And never imagined.

Micaela. Stacion. Artha.

Now the cocoon is fully hardened. He sees nothing outside it.

"Listen to me," he says, "whatever you're going to do, I want you to know that *I've been there.* I've seen the sun and the moon and the stars. It wasn't Jerusalem, it wasn't the Taj Mahal, but it was something. That you never saw. That you never will. The possibilities out there. The hope of enlarging your soul. What would you understand about that?"

Droning sounds from the far side of the milky web that contains him. They are reading him the relevant sections of the legal code. Explaining how he threatens the structure of society. Necessary to eradicate the source of peril. The words blend and mingle and are lost to him. The dolly begins to roll forward again.

Micaela. Stacion. Artha.

I love you.

"Okay, open the chute." Clear,

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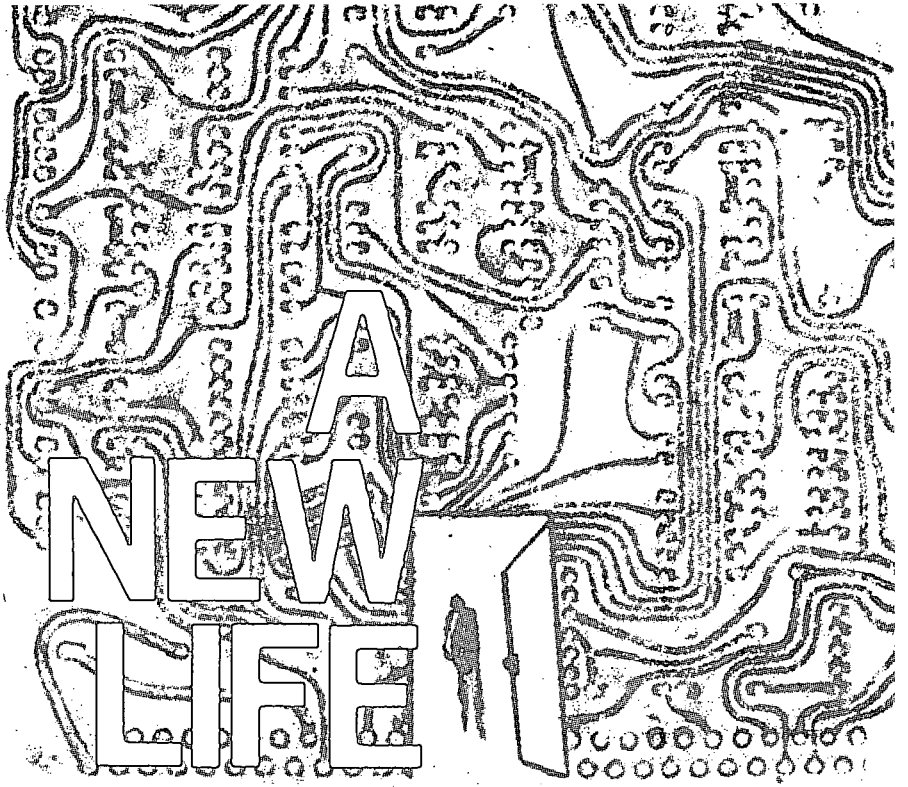

HAROLD KRAUS

HEADLIGHTS starkly illuminated the long frontage of the one-story cement building as the car slowly came to a stop. He nodded to the guard, let himself in with his passkey and took the self-service elevator down four flights. With another passkey, directly from the elevator, he entered a bare, cement-walled room two hundred feet square. In the center of the room stood a box sheathed in glossy black panels forty-eight feet long, eight feet high and eight wide. A bench in front of it.

He walked over to the box, rested his bowed head against a paneled side for a moment, then reached up and flipped a switch. A cold blue light a half-inch in diam-

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eter began to pulse brightly and, as it blinked on and off slowly, seemed to signal reserves of enormous power. He flipped another switch activating the sound mechanism and a pulsing yellow light appeared. Tiredly he sat down on the bench and gazed at the black panels through unfocused eyes.

"Twenty or so MTC men are coming here tomorrow to give you a going over," he finally said. "The board of directors of the Minitronics Communications Corporation has decreed it's about time you began to earn some money. The target date to make you operational is a year from tomorrow. It will take some doing. There are great gaps in your memory, additional circuitry should be installed and it ordinarily would take a full year before you were properly debugged. They also are considering removing your voice and putting it in storage until a money-making use for it presents itself. They don't know it—but I will not be here tomorrow. In fact I will never be here again, so this conversation is something in the nature of a farewell. We might as well be formal about it. Now, good evening, Mr. Machine."

"Good evening, Clarence," the machine replied in a pleasantly cultivated voice.

"I am quite depressed this evening. I don't believe I could tolerate levity or even friendliness. I would prefer to be called Mr. MacKay. Let's begin again. Now, good evening, Mr. Machine.

"Good evening, Mr. MacKay," the machine said. The spoken word "now," followed by a pause of three seconds or more had been chosen years before to alert the machine that a spoken response was required. No reason had ever arisen to change this arrangement.

The events of the past few weeks had had a cumulative, deeply depressing effect on MacKay. It had begun when he agreed to have lunch with a total stranger—an unusual thing for him to do—with a science writer for *Tempus*, the news magazine, the most offensive man he could recall ever having met. Questions of outrageous intimacy had been put to him until he had dropped the bread he was buttering and stood up and announced the interview at an end.

The *Tempus* man had remained seated and had said, "Before we part, would you care to read your obituary? It usually has a bracing affect on a man. I've had it on file for years."

They had taken a taxi to the Tempus Building and a folder containing six typewritten sheets was taken from the file and handed to him. He read it standing near the doorway.

Died: Clarence Murray MacKay, physicist and theoretician in the field of communications and advanced

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computer design. A moving force in the burgeoning second industrial revolution, MacKay was known to many colleagues as a man arrogant and imperious in manner and many had smarted from encounters with him in the day to day work of science. By the few who were close to him he is remembered for his personal loyalty and passionate humanism.

Born in the cornbelt on a small Iowa farm he . . .

THE key statement in any obituary when it could be used. Implied that the system made it possible for any slum child, any ghetto child, to be a success if he made the effort. It was a concept so deeply embedded in the mythology that it probably had been routinely included. To have been a farm boy was somehow superior and more exotic than being a newsboy now that farmers were only five per cent of the population. The remainder of the obituary was a remarkably accurate digest of his activities except, of course, for those completely apocryphal stories about him the year he lectured at Cambridge. They marked him as an eccentric but in a somewhat flattering sense.

"Didn't read it myself until a few minutes before I left the office to meet you for lunch," the *Tempus* man said. "I send about a dozen names a year to research. Part of the job.

"Journalistically speaking of course you realize, Professor, yours is an obit of small magnitude. You are preceded in importance by a hundred entertainers led by the current female incarnations of sex, by two hundred politicians and military heroes, fifty athletes and a growing number of murderers, hoodlums, gangsters and Mafia captains who during their lifetime succeeded in making the front page. If your obit is used at all it will probably consist of the first paragraph you read. And there is always the chance that if the make-up department needs another column-inch of space to fit in a toothpaste ad you will die twice. You will die and your obit will be killed. Are there any misstatements? Would you care to amplify any of the statements made? I can assure you anything you care to say will be added to the record."

He had walked out without answering. The man had actually toyed with him. Made two false assumptions: one, that a *Tempus* staff man was invulnerable; two, that he had interviewed a defenseless academic. His behavior had been undoubtedly encouraged through the years by the men he interviewed who consciously or unconsciously tried to curry favor with him in the hope of being personally mentioned in a favorable

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manner in addition to the subject at hand. Time to stop his motor. Should he bother with such a nonentity? Why not? It would make the world a slightly less unpleasant place. Simple matter to have MTC cancel its heavy *Tempus* advertising schedule as long as the science writer remained on staff. He would find it wise to resign before many weeks passed.

Have I in fact been arrogant? Perhaps I should stop referring to engineers as mechanics . . .

It seemed to ruffle a lot of feelings. No, they were mechanics. *Have I quite unaware, ridden my reputation?*

That attractive young sociology instructor, Columbine. Pinching her bottom. She had been startled then had swung her head up and neighed like a horse. Pleased. But the consequences could have been quite unpleasant. Saw her at work whenever he went to the library. Pitching for her Ph.D. Regiments, divisions, armies in libraries busily rewriting one another. Single original concept nourishment for a thousand scholars. What nonsense did she teach? One thing certain, it had strong humanitarian implications. An infinite number of variables but still the social sciences. Science the new religion.

Unusual name she had. Well his own name, Clarence, had become unusual and much used by fiction writers for comic or effete characters. Fashion in names. Flux of life. Life unbearable without it. When they dubbed her did they know Columbine was the daughter of Pantaloon and the sweetheart of Harlequin? Name fit the subject. Her swaying hips as she walked along a delight to see. The vital force still alive in him. How would he be if he lived as long as Carlson? Flying out to the west coast to honor Carlson on his eighty-fifth birthday. Carlson only mildly pleased. His beloved teacher but the love no longer returned. The fires completely out.

HE SHOULD visit Ellington one more time before he went away. Had he done any further work with Don Juan? The urgent message to visit his laboratory. There were the five chimpanzees, all but one wearing miniature yellow plastic helmets like construction workers. Don Juan, with his construction worker's helmet tipped rakishly forward on its elastic bands to expose the terminals of two electrodes, was standing at a low table. He had a hard on. A platter of fruits and nuts was at his side. Don Juan quickly pressed the button mounted on the table.

"I've finally hit a sexual gratification center, this lower electrode pointing down to the brainstem," Ellington said. "There's sufficient visual evidence, but as a further check I sunk the other electrode to the midbrain reticular activating system and get the distinctive elec-

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trical pattern of sexual activity. There seems to be no satiation point. When the current goes off every twenty seconds he immediately presses the button and puts it on again. Its close to four hours now and he hasn't eaten a thing. I'm going to leave the current on as long as he continues to react. I hope I don't damage him.

"Well Clarence how are you? It's been a long time since you've been here. I've missed you. When you used to drop in every week or so and sit there silently watching these mannikins for an hour or two at a stretch I always meant to ask if you thought you were learning anything. I might as well have asked if you thought they were learning anything. All the time you were observing them they were observing you, with their brief, shy, sidelong glances.

"Have you noticed I lost Jacko? Had to go. He was getting to be quite a young man and he was an extra male. I might have walked in here one morning and found a bloody riot had taken place. Chimps don't ordinarily pair off and they are not sexually possessive, but it's best to play it safe. If I were working with hamadryas baboons where each male requires a harem there would have been bloody riot and murder long ago just as there was at the London Zoo. Jacko is now at the Aeromedical Research Laboratory at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. They're going to train him to operate a few simple instruments and then shoot him into space with a television camera for a month voyage. They were very anxious to get Teddy because I have a pleasure and pain electrode in place. Put some pressure on me. I don't say they abuse their animals but I was put off by the terminology they use. What I call pleasure and pain centers they call reward and punishment centers.

"Teddy," Ellington called. A chimpanzee loped over and pressed his thin lips against his arm. Ellington lifted the helmet. "Notice I've used only one electrode for both the pleasure and pain points. I couldn't possibly have used two. Moving this one just two one-hundreths of an inch switches it from point to point. I've got it strongly secured in the pleasure position. Pleasure and pain centers are frequently found this close together. It's a frightful thing to activate a pain electrode. Teddy broke two front teeth biting the edge of the table. The pleasure circuit seems to be completely nonsexual. That is, Teddy would act just like Don Juan but with no indication of sexual activity."

He groped in his pocket and took out a penny and gave it to Teddy. "Run along now," he said. Teddy went to the slot machine, inserted the penny and pulled the lever. A few peanuts dropped into his hand.

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"I need help and I can't get it," Ellington continued. "Take Rosy over there. I've had two appetite electrodes in her hypothalmus for the past month now. One will make her eat compulsively and the other will cause an aversion for food. I've invited just about every gastroenterologist in town here. They come, and I hook up Rosy and put on my little show. They're all amused to see her eating compulsively but not one of them is interested in putting in a few weeks of honest work. I've got to know what's going on inside her.

"And now I'm saddled with that pathetic little girl." He pointed to a chimpanzee crouched motionless and staring in a corner. She was the only chimpanzee without a miniature construction worker's helmet. "She was sent to me as a replacement for Jacko. The poor thing is an idiot. Down in the books as Elsie. I was able to trace her history. She was picked up by traders in Africa when she was still of nursing age and kept in a small cage alone for more than a year. The market fell off sharply when seven university primate centers were established. Don Juan here is a Harvard man. The others come from Emory University. Elsie is an extreme example of what happens to countless thousands of children. No affection and stimulation early in life and some degree of reduced mental capacity seems inevitable.

"Take off Juan's hat? No, that would only distress him. They are just as much creatures of habit as we are. I'm the only man who uses them. The first chimp I worked with snapped off the terminal of the electrode swinging on the bar. It was a messy piece of business probing to remove the wire. I had to devise some sort of protective covering if I wanted to work with free-moving chimps. When you hit a good spot you don't remove the electrode. You may never hit the same spot again. It wasn't too difficult to condition them to wear their hats . . ."

THE *Tempus* man had been a triviality compared to the shock effect of seeing the full-page picture in Computer World of the MTC board of directors standing in front of the machine. There he was, ruthlessly revealed, a little old man. Dear God, a little old man. What had he seen in the mirror as he shaved each morning? What would the end be? Heart? Stroke? Cancer? Heart could be a nasty thing. That man from the University of Pennsylvania after the meeting. Howling and crawling on his hands and knees half across the lobby of the hotel before he expired. He had made provision for a situation such as cancer. There would be no perverted humanitarian prolonging of the experience until he was a drug-stupefied, whimpering vegetable.

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A man spent decades dying. More than half his taste buds and sense of smell were dead. His brain was at least a quarter of a pound lighter in weight. The vital force on which all physical and mental creativity ultimately depended began to wane, in males at any rate, as early as sixteen years of age and only a flicker of it remained alive in MacKay.

He would no longer arrange his schedules to be free in April and May to spend the springtime at his home in the Italian countryside. The beauty of the dawn hour and the clamorous small noises of life were no longer for him. His visit this last spring had been a harrowing experience. Heaven and earth had seemed wrapped in a blanket of silence. He could no longer hear the birdsong. Yes, the high notes went first. He had returned to New York in a few days.

What was the rest of the dreary catalog for a man seventy-one years old? An obvious loss of muscular capacity. He breathed less air and yet needed more. The loss of efficiency in extracting the amount of oxygen he required was perhaps as much as fifty per cent. His heart pumped about a third less blood and took longer to recover from the exertion. His nerve impulses traveled slower and his reaction time was slower. Drive carefully. A third or more of the waste-eliminating nephrons of his kidneys were gone. Be abstemious. Drink with the young and suffer the consequences of a crashing hangover. That just about summed it up. Yet, he could not ignore the possibility that he might live as long as Carlson.

Could sexuality conceivably be reduced to an electrical current of a fraction of one volt in a small neuronic circuit? And if compulsive eating is caused by the function or dysfunction of another neuronic circuit what happens to psychiatric concepts? The closeness of the pain and pleasure points. It was a certainty there was some small degree of electrical leakage. If there were a slight increase in leakage at an early age wouldn't it create a masochistic personality? What then happened to psychiatric concepts? In an overall sense could increasing leakage with age, and consequent cross-talk, be a cause of dotage? What a terrible thing to happen to a man. How would be know? Oliver Wendell Holmes of the Supreme Court, who remained on the bench until his nineties, had friends pledged to tell him if he acted peculiarly. Wonderful man. Went to burlesque shows with a book. When the girls went off and the comics came on read book.

Life was such an incredibly brief moment of space-time. He remembered . . . why it seemed . . . Alice when he was seventeen years old. Their evenings in the fields all that summer. The exquisite first

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exploration of sex. The mail-order black silk stockings it would have been scandalous to wear in town carried in her bosom and put on in the fields. They had much freedom. Her mother timid and permissive, her father always traveling on his job as a manure spreader. Respectfully known as a manure spreader. Respected sales representative of large chemical firm, one of the first to manufacture fertilizers. The mounting strain of ethical considerations and finally his agonizing declaration that he could not marry her for years and it would be best if they did not see one another again. Foolish boy. That's what she had said, that was all she had said. Foolish boy. Soon afterward she had left town and taken a job as a typewriter in Des Moines. The sweetness of the flesh in youth. Only in youth. Thrown away by youth. Realized by youth only years later when it was gone forevermore.

Had he really been arrogant? He should have dropped his opening statement to his seminars. Together with the two Cambridge stories it probably had made him something of a campus character.

"THIS is a seminar in communications. Within these walls there will be no limitations to expression. No words will be considered forbidden, obscene or immoral. I have no prepared lectures and very little hard information to offer you. I hope to learn from our discussions. I must tell you, however, that I have a basic point of view which holds that reality—and the truth, whatever that may be—is humanly unknowable. We are readers of instruments and the bodily instruments of our senses. We will hold to be true any system of communication that serves a pragmatic purpose. In my own work I productively use two different and conflicting theories of light. They are both therefore true for me. Professional philosophers used to construct systems of reality which were entertaining to read. Today our philosophers are all semanticists, but they throw no light into the darkness. A leading German philosopher has recently published a book which is offered as an exploration of what he calls "The Isness of the Whatness." I do not recommend that you read it. Only one word of wide popularity will be forbidden in this seminar and that is "sophisticated." A word which is commonly used to describe a personality trait, a piece of machinery, a technique and a woman's brassiere is a corpse on the pathway to clarity of thought and requires a hasty burial . . ."

That side of beef from the English department charging that he must hold himself morally responsible for what he had done. Precisely what had he done? True, he had seen his thought translated in-

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to hardware for the military. With a few servomechanisms the same thought could program the work of any factory and bring an end to drudgery if a man were not so much cheaper to buy than a machine.

Could he possibly be classed with that two hundred per cent American Hungarian physicist appearing before a Senate committee and demanding the construction of more hydrogen bombs when an arsenal already existed for kill and overkill twice over? A projection to the end of the coming decade of nuclear power stations worldwide showed enough plutonium as a by-product to make a thousand elementary Hiroshima-type bombs a month. In thirty different nations a plaything in the hands of the most sadistic murderous animal on the face of the earth. The usual humanitarian fog, it can't really happen, when it was glaringly obvious that it would happen. Invite them all to a meeting. Serve tea. Admonish them to behave like ethical, humanitarian, Christian gentlemen. He might well live to see the world die. Give the squirrels a chance at the evolutionary process. The final product could hardly be worse.

Why had he found it impossible to avoid a biotic approach to his work? The human brain was an exceedingly primitive and inefficient instrument. The universal romanticism about it was nothing short of preposterous. Bare survival and not improved communication had guided its evolutionary development. It was subject to the constant turbulence of emotionality. Its memory was extremely limited and largely uncontrollable. It retrieved the simplest information in a most laborious manner. Yet, if he knew by what mechanism it screened the stimuli of its environment which otherwise would keep it in perpetual convulsions the knowledge would be of tremendous value.

DON JUAN was seated on a cushioned chair when he visited Ellington again late the next afternoon. Ellington looked haggard. Juan still had a hard on, was still pressing the button every twenty seconds.

Man of the future. Dozen electrodes anchored to his skull. Wear hat if self-conscious. Pocket battery and selector dial. Dinner served, dial for good appetite. Restraint necessary. Like alcohol. Wish to experience again rolling in the hay with girl friend, tune in memory electrode and brainstem sex activating electrode. Save taking long subway ride to Brooklyn.

"He hasn't slept or eaten a thing," Ellington said. "Don't you think I ought to break the circuit? It's close to thirty hours now. I don't know what I would prove if I allowed it to continue until he collapsed. Juan is better equipped

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than we are. He's got a bone in his penis. All primates have except man. How sad. I have a patient at the hospital I should be seeing soon. Poor chap had a brain tumor and now he's dying of cancer of the stomach. Have to time my visits carefully. He delays his scheduled shot of morphine to be alert when I come. He looks forward to seeing me. He knows he's a goner and he enjoys the electrode work.

"I hit a memory point that's a great pleasure to him despite his pain. Memory circuits are so vivid they are experienced as double consciousness. He is visiting his aunt and cousins on his twelfth birthday. They have a surprise party for him. He hears all the shouting and laughter. I left the electrode in place and hooked him up like Juan. He can enjoy his birthday party whenever he wishes. I am interested to see if the memory fades or expands.

"Why don't you come with me? We'll unhook Juan and wait a while to be sure he's okay and then go to the hospital together."

"I think I'll skip the hospital. I've been rather depressed lately," he had told Ellington. "I dropped in to tell you I was going away soon and I don't think I'll be back."

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know."

"What will you be doing?"

"I don't know."

"What about your work?"

"I don't give a damn about my work. I reached an age some time ago when a man is likely to become aware of his own mortality, an intimate personal awareness of his inexorable dissolution. It can be a time of searching reassessment. My thoughts ran to the evident truth that a man's culture, with religious fervor, gives him values which he must accept unquestioningly or suffer severe penalties, even if those values are monstrous and brutalizing. All history seems little more than a continuous documentation of it. As for myself, I feel I had been given a contract for life, to sign without reading, which assured all my aspirations would prove bogus, and a shabby morality which guaranteed life would be joyless, sterile and malevolent. It's probably just a passing melancholia. I've had a few unpleasant experiences recently."

"You are in a bad way, Clarence," Ellington said. "Why don't you come around to my place this evening for dinner and a few drinks? My numerous family is enough to jar anyone into a different frame of mind, and you might find my kids more interesting to watch than the chimps . . ."

LIKE all mankind, he had been relentlessly programed, conditioned, since the day he was born. If by some miracle it were possi-

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ble to deprogram himself what, as a rational man, would he do with the time still left to him? Why not a Mediterranean cruise to think about it. Take a call girl along. How did one go about finding a call girl? What a country boy he was. MTC's sales promotion manager of course. It had taken him years to realize the man was a part-time pimp.

Oh, the time. He looked at his pocket watch. Still time to make it. A solid hour of Pearl White in the old silent movie, The Perils of Pauline. What a treat. It would bring him back to his youth. He hoped they hadn't added a sound track. Piano music, yes. Piano music would be fine. The old silent movie house always had a piano player just as the whorehouse had a piano player. The simile was apt. If he dozed off and were awakened by that hard-sell commercial and had to watch a man shaving a peach with an electric razor he really wouldn't mind. It would intensify the nostalgia.

He got to his feet and raised his hand to the switches and then paused.

"Now, by the way," he said, "if by any chance they ask you about me tomorrow will you say I've gone to America?"

"I will, Mr. Mackay," the machine said.

He flipped the two switches and the cold blue light and the yellow went out. ★

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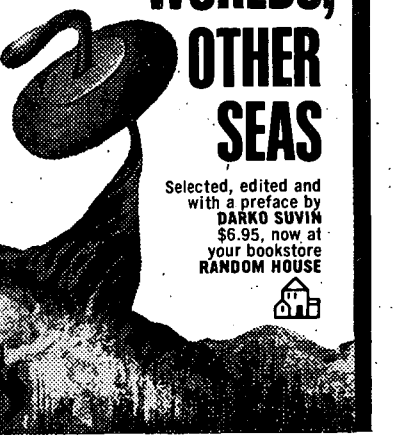

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RANDOM HOUSE

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"IT'S just a question of adapting your methods to the peculiarities of our computer," the young man in gray said. He was sitting alertly on a chair that was six inches too low, his briefcase open flat on his lap and his attention fixed on the other man who, at the moment, gave the impression of being dug in behind his large clean desk. Thank goodness the man's secretary had finally left. "I realize that our conditions of sale are unorthodox but we have a tremendous investment to protect and some very active competitors. It all comes back to cost-effectiveness, as I've been saying. Our computer is slow and there are jobs it can't handle in real time. But it can handle so many processes in parallel that for most big jobs it simply can't be beat. Especially it can't be beat in cost to the user." Charles Skiller snapped his briefcase shut. "Well, Dr. Ericson, I can't add any

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READOUT TIME

WILLIAM T. POWERS

more to what I've said. Any other questions?"

Ericson slowly leafed through the sheets of scribbled paper in front of him. His gray hair was tousled where he had kept running his fingers through it during the past hour's conversation. He came to one notation on a well-covered sheet and ran his fingers through his hair again.

"The BC-1 will invert a fifty-thousand-element matrix in ten milliseconds, it says here. I wish you could tell me why it can't do anything simpler in less time than that. I just don't like the idea of buying a black box."

"If I told you what was in the box or even let you look inside it, that would be the end of Parsys, Inc. All we have to sell is computational capacity produced in a way that is highly proprietary. Anyway, all you really need access to is the peripheral equipment, the interface

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between computer proper and external input-output devices. You couldn't service the mainframe if you wanted to. The computer accepts 72-bit binary inputs, a thousand of them—and the same for outputs, all in parallel. Anything outside this information boundary is accessible; you can add your own devices if you wish, buy them from us or shop around for other sources. You can buy standard computers from our competition for input-output processing. We're not trying to put anybody out of business—all we insist on is that we stay in business ourselves, profitably."

"All right, you said that before," Ericson said grumpily. "I don't see how we can pass it up—or at least pass up a trial. A flat four thousand dollars a month, you say? And a minimum of one year and no bargaining?"

"Correct. This is an adaptive machine and you won't see it reaching its full capacity for that long."

"And you guarantee that it isn't just full of graduate students with desk calculators?"

Skiller merely smiled.

Ericson stared at the upper left opposite corner of the room for a long moment, then stood up.

"Done. Have it here in thirty days. We'll need that long to meet the installation requirements, so don't show up early. What do I sign?"

He signed the sort of thing that people sign, and Skiller departed, swinging his briefcase jauntily as he went.

Parsys, Inc. was located well out of the city, across a country road from a forest preserve, in a two-story building about a block square. The building still showed signs of newness; some of the second-story windows still had a few stickers on the glass and the area around the driveway was black, with just a speckling of grass shoots emerging into the spring sunlight. Skiller swung his car around the front driveway, past the entrance steps, and parked it more or less at random; sawhorses still blocked the entrance to the parking lot. As he went up the three broad steps to the door, Skiller took in the stone-and-glass of the building's expanse and reflected that to some people this would bespeak a lavish hand with funds, which it did. It reeked of money—but so far it was all someone else's money. And that someone had a tendency to panic when the quarterly payments were half an hour late and could descend at a moment's notice—since the last quarterly payment was in arrears by a month so far—and declare that Parsys, Inc. would henceforth be devoted to light manufacturing.

Oh, well, Skiller thought as he waited for the elevator. *We now have a firm order and by this time next year we'll either be in business*

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for good or in jail. Why worry about a matter of degree in such a clear-cut situation?

The elevator never came, so he walked down to the basement level (the second floor was to have been ready for occupancy two months ago) and entered the main—or at least the only fully-equipped—office and the middle of an argument.

LIZ CARTER was standing, a furious black-haired bundle of sex in an orange scrap of something, in front of Farley Porter's desk, both hands clenched around crumpled pieces of paper with typing on them, saying, "... that out, Farley, I mean it. Just quit it. I'm not one of your stupid gerbils and I haven't got time for your—" Skiller raised his eyebrows—"... ing cute little games. Hello, Charlie. The next time you want to flex your mighty brain go out in back and use it on something that will make us some money. I haven't been paid for two months and all I need now is for some brilliant psychologist to get his kicks from — Charlie, you're smiling. What happened?"

"Sold. Thirty days. What's Farley been up to now?"

"Just look. Look at what I've been typing. He's been working on me all morning and I was too busy to notice and now look. It'll take me the rest of the day to get back to normal."

The pieces of paper were neatly typed but every other line stopped three inches short of the margin, giving an interesting scalloped effect to the page when viewed at a distance.

Farley leaned back in his swivel chair, focusing his eyes about a foot below Liz' face. "Sorry, doll. I was just testing a theorem. Reinforcement at the sequence level, converging to a very reliable binary counter. I'll bet on the last letter you didn't miss the alternation once and I'll also bet that you got every word spelled right. No interference, see?"

Skiller scanned the letter he was holding. "Right. Go teach it to BC-1. I sold one."

There was silence suddenly, and then a scrabbling from an adjoining office. Perry Jackson rolled into view in his desk chair and made his brown face into something like a pleased look.

"Duh plantation am saved, boss?"

Skiller dropped into his own chair and opened the briefcase on his desk. He extracted the order form and handed it to Liz who passed it around. Ericson's signature was bold and black at the bottom of the second page.

Porter took off his glasses, polished them and, after a glance at Liz put them back on. Liz sat down at her typewriter. Jackson rolled through the doorway and propped his feet up on a vacant

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desk, folding his hands across his middle. Clearly, this was a Big Moment.

"Uhm, did he read it all?" Porter finally asked.

"We went over it for an hour," Skiller said. "He agreed to everything."

"Security, too?"

Skiller nodded. "And we have thirty days. How's BC-1?"

Jackson sighed. "Dumb. I put a third-order differential equation through last night and it just disappeared. No printout at all. And something has gone wrong with the filter unit—it smells. I tried a memory dump and it gave me 72,000 ones. It's lying to me." Jackson looked vaguely pleased. "Somebody told it I'm colored."

Liz said, "Oh, funny." She crossed her legs, glanced at the result and put both feet on the floor again. "Well, let's do something. Let's you do something. I'm going out and buy a new dress. You're all looking at me." She plucked at the front of her orange scrap and hunched her shoulders. "Why is everybody so nervous? Isn't this what we wanted?"

Six eyes focused on her, here and there. She stood up defiantly. She twitched defiantly.

Then she grabbed her purse from under her desk and said, "God damn you all, I thought it was a pretty dress," started to cry and ran out of the office, slamming the door.

There was a long moment's silence. Then Porter let out a long breath.

"Right. Now let's think."

Jackson said, "Now she's going to hate us."

"No," Skiller said. "She would have had to come in nude tomorrow, trying to get someone to notice her. Now she doesn't have to."

Porter said, "Let's think. I've wasted the whole morning pulling her pigtails and trying to keep from jumping her right on her desk. I'm worn out. Let's go argue with BC-1."

C-1 occupied the center of what some day was supposed to be full of BC-1s, 2s, and so on. For economy only the overhead fluorescents in the immediate area of the computer were on. The assorted racks of electronic devices and the random tables covered with papers and the chairs scattered here and there made an island of brilliance and purpose in the center of the empty assembly room. The three men moved to an upright rack from which thick draperies of cables ran to a ten-foot cube in the center of the mess. Jackson flipped on some switches and pilot-lights sprang up. A line-printer went *kachung* and waited, humming.

Jackson said, "All right, give me the reel marked 'NG' and I'll show you." He accepted the roll of tape, mounted it in a tape trans-

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port beside the rack, flipped loops between rollers and poked a few buttons. The reels spun briefly and stopped. "Ready."

At the rack, Porter pressed a button and from within BC-1 came a soft chiming sound. In about ten seconds, a red READY legend appeared on one panel of the rack and Porter pushed another button. The tape reel began to spin, kept spinning for about thirty seconds and then stopped abruptly, the dangling loops oscillating to equilibrium.

"We can't have that smell," Skiller observed. "Let's knock out another panel and put in a second filter unit. How long has this one been operating?"

"Oh, about—uh—" Jackson paused, looking enlightened. "I don't think it's ever been changed. That's about three months."

"Well, we service every month, so that should be all right, then. Is this the differential equation you were talking about?"

Just then the line-printer began to go pup-pup-pup-pup and the paper flowed into the receiving basket, folding itself neatly in a zigzag. One hundred and eighty decimal characters per line, ten lines per second.

Jackson said, "Of course this is only one printer channel; we should have received three more line-printers by now so we could check out at least four channels running in parallel, but this is a pretty close simulation. I have the system hooked up to a multiplexer sampling sixty-four output channels in rotation. It's almost the same thing as parallel output. Hey, look, it's data!"

Skiller ran a finger down one column of numbers; they progressed in an orderly way from one value to slightly larger or smaller values, as the solution to a continuous equation should. "Looks okay but is it right?"

"Right, schmight," said Porter. "They're all working together and they're computing—let's take a look inside."

He flipped the line-printer off, stopping the flow of paper, and led the way to the other side of BC-1 where a short ladder led up to a wooden platform five feet off the floor. They climbed up and Porter lifted a panel labeled "I.O." from the top surface of the cube, revealing a three-foot-square aperture covered with semireflecting plastic. Gathering around, the three leaned their elbows on the frame of the one-way mirror and looked down into the brilliant interior of BC-1.

A bustle of activity: tiers of cubicles with connecting corridors and ramps; tunnels and platforms; scurrying little brown and gray forms zipping from one place to another, sometimes dragging an inert form with them and sometimes alone; other hunched headforemost in the little cubicles, the

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bobbing of the backs indicating rapid and continuous little movements but giving no view of what was happening.

"Watch," Jackson said. "Right near the end of the program I've put in a long loop for exercising the whole input-output module at one time. Last night the critters got confused and they were all responding to everything—that's when I got all ones for the output."

Suddenly the whole bank of cubicles that was visible began a flurry of synchronized activity; a ripple of bobs began at one corner, traveled swiftly across one row, back down the next lower row and so forth, until within a few tenths of a second the disturbance had reached the extreme lower-left cubicle. Then the cycle began again at the instant it ended.

"This is a 7200-unit module, and each unit is good for about a thousand bits, so we've got 7.2 megabits per cycle right now, potentially—this loop is giving the same context-address to everyone, so something like one percent of memory is being outputted. And I've got the peripheral computer checking the output, so it must be okay now. It sure wasn't last night."

"Have you checked the redundancy? You couldn't have if the module wasn't working." Porter suddenly pointed. "Never mind, there goes one now."

A squad of little brown and gray forms, looking like slightly undersized shrews because that is what they were, scurried up a ramp on the input-output module and dragged a body out of one cubicle. Another animal squeezed into the cubicle past the body being extracted and began bobbing up and down immediately. The others pulled the casualty down the ramps to the very bottom and disappeared through a small door.

Porter said, "No alarm. Either the standby circuit is working or the alarm isn't. But the cleanup squad showed up in plenty of time. What's the MTBF been running?"

Jackson pulled out a pocket notebook and thumbed through it. "Mean time between failures—about twelve days now. Pretty good. You've just doubled it since we started. And I think they're definitely smarter than they were eight generations ago. We might even try slowing the metabolism a little more."

"No go," Porter said. "I've run into a problem there. The brains are getting larger and there's a definite tradeoff between metabolic rate and keeping that brain in good shape. I still can't tweak the one without something coupling into the way the next strand of RNA replicates, messing up the other.

"But I still think we have a way to go before we run out of gains just from reorganization. Look at all that bobbing, for instance—

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that's tiring and it doesn't contribute to the output at all. They don't have to do that—but it's gotten to be very popular, I see. Maybe we have to work some more on their lower levels—make the stuff in the recreation room more sensitive, so they get used to bigger effects from less output. The strategy of reorganization has gotten awfully complicated, though—I'm afraid to tinker much more with this model."

They all straightened up, and Porter and Jackson put the panel back in place. BC-1, the first commercial biological computer, stood bukly and silent in its pool of light, as the three men fussed a bit more over the printer output, rewound the tape, cut the power to the peripheral machinery and left. Jackson was saying, "I don't think there's any such word as 'gotten' and you said it twice—" as the door closed.

INSIDE BC-1 a one-hour shift was ending. Little gray and brown animals scurried up the ramps, climbed the tiers of cubicles in a wave, and others began descending. In less than half a minute the changeover was complete. The new set of animals stood alertly in their cubicles. Then the lights in the I.O. Module began to dim and these animals began to leave, too. The abandoned cubicles remained dark. In each were five tiny light-bulbs and a single spring contact which could be closed by a slight downward pressure.

The holiday began, with much creeping about in mysterious dark passageways, much cavorting amid the levers and springs and wheels and games of chance in the recreation room; much frantic sex when it suddenly became possible; roaring good times in the juvenile mess-hall where the simplest and stupidest shrew could feast on things that tasted good, felt good, and wriggled good at no more expense than operating an elementary mechanism; and much lovely napping in dark private holes, one thousand to the cubic foot. The infinite universe, ten feet on a side fed, entertained, educated, protected and contained its little brains, demanding only that of the million bits each could handily store just a thousand be reserved, and of the hundreds of actions each could control for twelve hours out of twenty-four only the special control of one or two actions for one hour out of four. Altogether, not a bad deal for animals whose primitive ancestors weighed a healthy 1/7 ounce, lived brief lives of hunger and anxiety and were possessed of entirely intolerable personalities.

"A COMPUTER," Skiller was explaining a month later and elsewhere, "is really just a model of what we think a brain is, which is a model in the first place. What

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we've done is to stop making models of models, and instead start making something like a collection of properties that organizes itself into a model that produces the behavior we want. We don't even think of it, among ourselves anyway, as a computer. It's a bunch of self-organizing units that can change the way they control their individual inputs, independently and individually, so as to maximize whatever they need maximized. All we do, all you do when you follow the programing instructions, is to see to it that what these units have to do to get what they need can only be done by solving your problem on the way. We create an artificial set of rules, for example, that makes inverting a matrix a necessary means which these units must use to keep themselves happy. They don't know that what they're doing is inverting a matrix, of course—no one of them performs any single action that could be called inverting a matrix—but when each of them lives by the rules we insert into its environment, all of them together end up inverting our matrix—or anything else we want them to do."

"That's gobbledygook," his feminine companion said. She was seated on a cushion across a low table from him and they were recovering from an expensive dinner. His feminine companion was a functioning vice president in charge of engineering for a large automobile manufacturer, a person who could say yes or no to installation of a BC-1, or a hundred, if she felt that it would save a dollar and a half per car, or fifteen million dollars per year. She was also quite attractive from most angles and had a smashing figure which she showed off to good advantage by the simple strategy of leaving it uncovered from the waist, or somewhat lower, up. The last ten years had been a devastating disaster to the textile mills, as Skiller had been discovering.

"Uh—it's what? No, it isn't." Skiller said. He had reached for his drink and become momentarily arrested in his train of thought. "Definitely not gobbledygook. Just a new idea, which is by definition hard to express in terms that sound familiar."

"Perhaps I would understand you better, Charles, if you would tell me the principles behind the—thing, if you don't want to call it a computer—you're trying to sell us."

"Sorry," said Skiller. "It's bad for industrial relations but that's the one thing I can't tell you. As far as anyone else is concerned, we're selling a computer with inputs and outputs and specifications and a software manual which teaches you how to make it program itself. In five years, maybe less, you'll know. We just want to take advantage of our priority while we can. You understand."

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"Oh, yes. I've taken advantage of many priorities while I had them—for heaven's sake, go ahead and look. Don't be furtive. This is a very delicate matter of style, and if you act old-fashioned I'll just have to go and put something on."

Skiller sagged for a moment and threw up his hands—discreetly.

"I can't look and I can't not look. There's a girl in our office who was working up to this but she seems to have cracked before we did. Are you really just being in style, or were you— Well, forget it." He stood up, smiled and said, "Let's say I'm old-fashioned and go get you something to put on—or get rid of the rest of it."

She gathered her things and stood to take his arm; she smiled, too, suddenly.

"I like your idea better," she said.

Nothing was signed that night, despite exp29ration of a number of possibilities.

SOMEWHAT after dawn the next day Skiller found himself shouting at Liz, who was a little more demurely attired but not quite enough to resolve the question of whether she was wearing anything underneath. "You know where we ended up? You *know* where we ended up! I'm going batty! If the executives aren't good-looking naked women their secretaries are—and if their secretaries aren't you know they haven't got enough money to buy a god-damned computer! Nobody's getting anything done any more except the queers!"

Liz said somewhat stiffly. "You're supposed to have a little self-control. It has nothing to do with sex. Women dress for other women."

"And undress for other men," Skiller replied. "Well, it used to have something to do with sex and as far as I'm concerned it still does. That goes for you, too." Liz hunched her shoulders. "And for Chrissake, stand up," he added and left before anything worse could happen. As he went out he heard the telephone ringing and Liz, after a short delay, answering it, and then he had to go back in.

"It's a Miss Stengler," Liz said. "*The*."

"Oh," he replied and put the telephone to his ear while not looking at Liz. Let her listen.

"Charles?" *Her* voice was quite neutral, considering.

"Yes, uh, Peggy. Or—"

"I'm sending Mr. Abernathy over to your office to continue the discussion."

"Mr. Abernathy?"

"Mister. He'll have all his wits about him and all his clothes on. I'm telling him to order ten BC-1 computers, or whatchmacallits, if he understands what you're talking about. He can say no."

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"I'm glad," Skiller said, "that there is still someone around this city who is concerned about the Gross National Product."

"There is. And don't ever call me again—on business."

After a while Liz suggested, "Hang up," so he did. "Well?" she said.

"I'm trying to decide whether I'm being worked on. Does she love me for my computer or for myself?"

"Don't ask me."

"Don't be annoyed. It's just that now they want to talk about ten computers."

"You must have been terrific."

"And don't be icy, either." He looked at her thoughtfully. "I feel like a convict who's just finding out that there are great silver birds in the sky. Have I been that much out of touch with things?"

"Since I've been here, you have. And you usually smell like shrews—or you used to before you went out selling."

"I thought the uncovered look was just in places like Los Angeles or Boston. They're all over—even at hamburger joints. Even teenagers. Doesn't anything—happen?"

Liz shrugged. And stood up straight. "Sure. Sometimes."

"Sometimes?"

"Well, why ask me? I don't go around counting."

"In public, you mean?"

Liz was beginning to look strange. "I suppose so—you always see a *few* kids—I mean, we're all healthy now, and you don't have to have a—" her voice dwindled away.

"Baby. But don't a lot of them have them anyway?"

"Charlie, I don't know. It just seems freer than it used to be. All right, it does have something to do with sex."

"I wonder," Skiller said. A thought was forming far back in his awareness—and another phenomenon was asserting itself, too. He was thinking, looking straight at Liz. Finally she simply reached up and unbuttoned the two top buttons of her blouse, settling the question as to what was underneath, and finally he noticed. The thought submerged in favor of the phenomenon.

AT NOON he went into the animal lab where Porter and Jackson had been conveniently stuck shaping some young shrews. Porter and Jackson greeted the news about the order for ten computers with skepticism and gladly turned the job of shaping over to Skiller. They finally agreed that since there was a possibility of more orders they had better get into the city and prime their main suppliers—and also carry the news to the man at the bank, who was understandably interested even in rumors of solvency. Jackson and Porter departed.

Skiller found that the initial

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shaping had gone well. Early in training, the human operator had to make the rules bend a little whenever the animals did something even partially like what was required, so that, for example, food would appear if the animal even made a motion toward the bar it was supposed to press. The human operator had to make himself a slave to the animal during this shaping phase.

Now, however, the young shrews were well past the initial bar-pressing phase and were learning the sequential aspects of the task, learning that if light A came on before light B there was no point in pressing the bar (experimentalists even got a mild shock if necessary, to emphasize the futility), and that if B came on before A, something highly edible would appear if the bar were pressed. This task was already straining the intellectual capacity of the shrews and from now on the complexity would not extend any higher; instead a desk-top computer would gradually add "sideways" to the task, adding more bits, essentially, without changing the kind of problem. In effect, the operation codes of BC-1 were being defined.

Finally Skiller was satisfied that the process could complete itself without his help. He went into the assembly room, passing the office on the way. He heard Liz typing and did not go in.

The thought that had been at the back of his awareness was growing larger now and he went to BC-1 with a feeling of foreboding. His own behavior astonished him; surely the provocation . . .

He dragged the wooden platform around to another side of BC-1, whick was now alone in the room and ready for delivery. He opened a different panel, this time having to unlock it; this one opened on the recreation room, actually a center in the computer which was concerned with only one thing: maintaining the training given the young shrews before they were introduced as replacements. He looked down into the space, this time dimly lit and full of shrews performing random-looking actions. A partition across the center separated the males and the females (they dutifully, one might say religiously, separated themselves after each work period). Some of the levers in each half of the room made mutual access possible and no shrew ever tried to mate except by this means. Shrews reproduce at a fantastic rate and in a protected environment would quickly overpopulate the entire computer, clogging it with uneducated animals. Training the animals to restrict their mating to the recreation room was difficult but essential, for only by controlling the number of times per day that the access-panels would open could the population be kept at a reasonable level. A chief function of the

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monthly servicing that was a mandatory part of the sales contract was to remove untrained young animals and replace losses with trained ones.

SO SKILLER rested his elbows on the viewing-port frame and contemplated the knots of animals around that particular set of levers on both sides. Not many, not too few. Porter regulated the RNA, as best he could with the unsatisfactory techniques available, so as to keep the drive for reproduction just low enough to be satisfiable in the recreation room, without accidentally destroying the increased intelligence, small size and longevity which were essential to the main purpose of BC-1.

Skiller brooded, however, not over this sexual situation, even though the parallel with his own recent experiences was unsettling, but over a larger picture. The entire recreation room consisted of only two types of objects: passive ones, which were immovable and served mainly as places to stand or things to hide behind, and active ones; levers and wheels and yielding obstacles, each one of which caused something to happen that research had proven was important to a shrew. Anything that the shrews could affect in any way reacted in turn, through circuitry and devices in the walls of the computer, to do something that mattered to the shrews. Each shrew, therefore, learned to control the wheels, levers, and yielding obstacles so as to receive the water it needed, the special foods it delighted in, the sex it wanted, the kind of light or dimness it craved at the moment, or in a word all the inner conditions that constituted its own inherited definition of good living—of survival. Since the rules connecting what the shrews did to what they received in return were indentically the operations of the computer, the shrews learned to do these things, to respond to disturbances of special sorts, by performing the actions that were the bases of elementary computational processes. If one light comes on, the left bar must be pressed to get food. If two lights, the right bar. If three lights, both. That is nothing more than one-bit binary addition with carry. Every shrew in the Arithmetic Module could perform, if necessary, five-bit addition, parallel-in, serial out, and there were usually about 500 animals in this module. One hundred twenty-five bit additions could therefore be performed at once if the problem required it. Furthermore the system was self-reorganizing; it would modify its own operation codes until the specified result was produced. All that was needed was the proper progression of changes in the rules—in the properties of the environment in which the shrews lived. It was all in the program-

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er's manual—in gobbledygook, of course.

And that is what went through Skiller's mind as he watched the small forms moving about among the devices in the divided recreation room. He was thinking about the whole environment of his shrews, watching how they mastered it and kept it under control, without ever knowing *why* doing this or that resulted in the consequences which were so delightful. The "why" was concealed in the walls and floor, into which the shrews could not see and which would have meant nothing to them if they could have looked.

So I do what feels good, Skiller thought, *and so do the rest of them. I do things and get good feelings back, and what happens between I have not the slightest idea. That's why I don't like what's been happening. I don't understand what changed the rules, or even what really changed, which seems to me like a change in the rules. Something has happened that affects me very personally and I have no control over it. I can only change the way I respond, so as not to be embarrassed or miss something. I have learned by rote and I relearn by rote. Where is understanding? It is not possible. It does not exist.*

HE WAS still there when Porter and Jackson returned. The bank was ecstatic. The suppliers were suspicious. In the middle of Jackson's review of the suppliers' demands for surety, mainly money, Skiller said, "I'm sorry, can we go into that tomorrow? Farley, I want to have a look at the RNA lab. I have an idea."

"Sure, if it's important," Porter said and led the way.

The RNA lab was mostly a machine for the automatic sequential decoding of long protein molecules by brute-force application of simple steps over and over without mistakes, night and day. This machine formed part of a feedback loop for an RNA synthesizer, which was capable of making systematic changes in existing RNA molecules. The operation of this servo was extremely slow, convergence to a specified molecule requiring at times several months, but sometimes it worked and sometimes the specified changes were accomplished without lethal side-effects on other parts of the chains. The remainder of the lab was a nice set of microsurgery tools, whereby the altered molecules could be implanted in a denucleated ovum, which sometimes developed into a shrew having new characteristics vaguely resembling what was wanted.

"Okay, what?" Porter asked when all three were in the lab.

"Can you unravel RNA in humans with this thing?"

"Naturally. But so far nobody has been able to decode most of it."

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"I know that. What I want to know is—could you use this thing to make human RNA into some other form without making something nonhuman at the same time?"

"That's impossible to say. We've unraveled a fair part of the human code—others have—but it seems that there are a lot of characteristics beyond the ordinary mental and physical ones we know about. At least there's a lot of code left after we think we have accounted pretty well for everything we do know about. But you know as well as I do that tinkering with human RNA that way is definitely naughty—death penalty and all that. You aren't mad at me, or something?"

"No. But I have reason to wonder what all those other parts of the human RNA code say. You say that most physical and mental characteristics have been traced. What is the rest for?"

"I said I don't know. You're not being very obvious."

Skiller suddenly sat down at a desk; he laughed briefly. "No, I'm not. Look, what I'm thinking about is really way ahead of our game—but think about this. Suppose we could crank up your gadget to put in some extra RNA links in your shrews *that don't affect their heredity*. Possible?"

Porter grew more interested. "Hey—you know what? I don't know. I don't think it's ever been tried. Do you mean—"

"I mean we could stop having to share memory capacity with the systems in the shrews that are already using the existing code structure. We could give every damned one of them a billion extra bits of storage capacity."

"But how would you read it out? If it isn't part of the existing code, the existing systems couldn't utilize the storage space and you couldn't put in a read-only memory for permanent instructions. You'd have to grind their brains up—"

Porter suddenly became agitated and went on in a new tone of voice. "By god, all you'd need would be a super-duper RNA reader, and you could get the readout from the casualties! A billion bits? A billion billion!"

Jackson broke in. "But the super-duper RNA reader?"

Porter said, "All right, we haven't got one. We haven't really pushed the reader because the bottleneck is the synthesizer. But if *all* we want to do is read, then maybe we could go into parallel operation—maybe we could make BC-1 operate a thousand parallel readers—why, we haven't even *thought* of the possibilities. Charlie, this may blow up in the morning, but right now I like it. I do like it very much."

Skiller was abruptly different. "Well, Farley, I just wanted to know what you think. You guys go on home now; I'll stay here and

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see that BC-1 closes down properly." In five minutes they had left and Skiller went back to BC-1. Liz was *still* typing, probably trying to get her margins even again. He smiled, and then unsmiled as he entered the assembly room.

A man can drive himself crazy supposing. Charles Fort probably did; I wonder if I was named for him. I'm driving myself nutty right now. All because I have spent ten years developing the world's first biological computer and have just discovered that I am now emerging into the real world, having lost about a century somewhere. That's the problem; I'm feeling left out and inept or something. No, not inept, that's for sure. Too ept, if anything. Too suspiciously ept, as if I have suddenly turned into somebody else. The rules have changed. WHY?

He undid the panel over the recreation room again. *Suppose,* he thought. *Suppose I had the super-duper RNA reader, and sup-*

★★★ GALAXY STARS ★★★

"When a reader buys a book he buys an entire package, consisting not only of the author's words but also the publisher's package, the blurb writer's blurb, and the art director's cover. I review books as opposed to manuscripts, and that is what distinguishes me," says Algis Budrys, "from most book reviewers. What distinguishes me from all critics is the proper sort of intelligence."

Budrys started at Galaxy many years ago as Associate Editor, working for Horace Gold. Being "the victim of favoritism," in his words, he was later tapped by Fred Pohl to do a regular book column for Galaxy, and he's been at it ever since. "I am eminently qualified to review books," he says, "because I am a pretty good automotive public relations man."

And his PR work in Chicago has kept him chasing around the country testing his client's products and too far from the typewriter this month to do his column.

Budrys sold his first yarn to Space Stories in 1953; he had been writing sf and getting rejected for about ten years. "My favorite magazine in those days was Planet Stories. Every time I sent a story in it was promptly rejected and the editor was promptly fired. When I finally sold a story, Cage of a Thousand Wings, the magazine folded. And I felt personally responsible."

Last time we talked to him, Budrys was out of his test cars and back at his typewriter. Writing next month's column? WHO knows?

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pose I had a real dilly of a problem, like "why", or "what for" or something else that might take ten thousand shrews ten thousand generations to solve. Suppose we got to the stage where a billion bits, or a billion billion bits, was just a drop in the bucket—what godawful problem would need that much storage? Who could we sell such a memory to? Nobody could even state a problem that would need that much storage to hold the answers.

But down there are the shrews, some of them—quite a few—lined up at those special levers. We ought to call this section the whorehouse. There they are, living their lives in a rather nice environment, containing all that shrews are known to need and probably a lot of luxuries as well; it's got everything we even suspect that they like, and all they have to do to get it is push a few pieces of environment around a little. They don't know why pushing here results in something good there, but they learn the rules; they know what to do. They have perfect control over their own inputs. But they do the controlling *our* way. The way that solves our problems, while they are solving their own tiny elementary ones.

Skiller sighed in disgust at himself, but his mind kept churning. Suppose! What a waste of time, but still, suppose. Suppose we were reaching the end of the computation, and the time was drawing close for final printout. It's been a big problem, and there will be a horrendous amount of output generated, intermediate results that must be stored, new conversion programs, reference tables to be generated. We'll just run out of storage space long before the final data are generated. We look down on our shrews, and realize that there just aren't enough of them. What do we do? Why, it's simple. We tinker with the RNA a little, up the drive, and change the rules connecting the levers to the little doors so that they open more often. We drop the price at the whorehouse. In a little while statistics will provide up with all the storage we need.

Skiller heard the assembly-room door open and close, and then soft footsteps approaching. Very soft. He was suddenly filled with a feeling that was almost panic, and he continued staring down into the recreation room, watching the levers go. The footsteps approached very close, and then Liz spoke.

"Charlie?"

"Just a minute, Liz." He did not turn around. He felt that he knew what she was going to say and in a second she said it.

"Charlie, don't you want to—look at me?"

Eventually, of course, he couldn't help it, then or ever again. ★

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DAVIS took the third expressway from 42nd Street to the site of the old Rockefeller Center, dropped down through the quadruple overpass and braked to a halt in the fourth level lot. He paused a moment before alighting from the car, trying to catch his breath—even in the car, with the CO filters on over-duty, the air was terrible. He donned his gas mask before he stepped into the lot, slammed the left-hand door into the unprotected door of the Cadillac parked next to him.

"Serve him right for crossing a parking line," he growled. He jumped aside quickly as a Mustang Mach V whistled past him, slammed around a corner, hurtled

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down the ramp to the street. He flung a curse after it.

He eased his head out between the parked cars before sprinting across the traffic lane of the parking lot to the elevator on the other side. The attendant rushed to him, tried to demand the $30 daily fee, stepped back when Davis flashed his Traffic Manager's badge at him. The attendant dropped to his knees in salute, stayed down while Davis rushed past.

His office was on the ground level of the Roads and Traffic Building and when he came off the elevator, the hall was full of dust and a jack hamer was going crazily at one end of it. The man behind it was wearing the light blue of Road Construction Unlimited. Davis remembered the spur route of the 2nd level, 57th Street West that was going through the building's corner. He hadn't expected construction to start this soon.

One wall had been ripped out of the office and the derricks were swinging the steel girders for the spur route into place. More men were driving them into the concrete of the floor, slamming them into place with magn-gun rivets. One of the drivers kept walking to the water cooler and Davis stopped him.

"That stuff is three dollars a gallon, buddy," he said.

"Road crew, Mac." The big man tried to push him aside and Davis flashed the badge.

"This is still my office, he said. He crossed to the control board, buzzed the Director.

"Davis in," he said.

I suppose the old bastard will want a report already. . .

"Right," the Director's secretary said, "I'll tell him."

Leingen waved at him from the casualty table and he trotted over, flashed the badge and Leingen nodded. He was off duty now, officially relieved—and he looked relieved.

Lucky bastard will be home in three hours—if he makes it . . .

The casualty report was horrendous, up 4.2% over the day before—with 17 dead on the United Nations area overpass alone. He dialed Road Service.

"Road," the voice on the other end said.

"Traffic Manager. Send a bird. I'm going up for a look." He checked some of the other reports —two breakdowns on the fifth level of the Tappan Zee bridge, both '79 Fords. Goddam people had no right driving two-year-old cars on the roads anyway. He buzzed Arrest Division.

"All 'seventy-nine Fords off the roads," he said.

"Rog." On the board he watched the red dots that were the Fords being shuttled off to the waiting ramps, clogging them. He flipped a visual to one of them, saw the cars jamming in and the

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bulldozers pushing them closer. The din around him was increasing and pieces of plasta-plaster were starting to fall from the ceiling.

"Slap up a privacy screen," he ordered. He received no answer and looked at one of the workmen driving the rivets for the girders. Jones wasn't there, he thought suddenly. Of course not, that girder is where his desk was. He'd miss Jones.

"That ain't a priority job, buddy," the workman said. "You want materials, get 'em from Construction."

DAVIS growled, checked his watch. 0807. Things were just moving into the third rush period. Almost on cue the building began to quiver as the lower echelon office workers hurtled by in their Lincolns and Mercuries to obscure little jobs in obscure little offices.

A short buzz came from the main phone. The Director.

"Yes, sir," Davis said.

"Davis?" the palsied voice said. *Die, you old bastard,* Davis thought. "Casualties are up all over."

"The roads are jammed, sir."

"You're Manager. Do something."

"We need more roads. Only you can authorize em."

"We don't have any more roads. But that traffic must move. Do what you have to." The voice went into a coughing spasm. "When you're Director, you build roads."

"Yes, sir." He punched off. All right, he's move the traffic. Say this for the Director—he'd back a Manager all the way.

"The bird's here," the intercom said.

"Smith," Davis said. His assistant looked up from the main board. "You're in charge. I'm going up." He moved to the elevator, bounced up, flipped his telecorder to audio, caught the information as he hurtled toward the tenth floor.

"Major pileup at Statue of Liberty East," the speaker barked. "Seventeen cars and a school bus. Ambulance on the scene. Structural damage on Fifth level East, Yankee Stadium Speedway. More accidents on Staten Island One, Two, Four, Ten, Thirteen, and Twenty-Two; East Side Four, Nine, and Eleven—" Davis punched off. Matters were worse than he had thought.

On the fifth floor he changed elevators to avoid the ramp from the exact-change lane to the fourth level, zipped to the roof and the waiting helicopter.

"Fifty-car pileup on Yankee Stadium Four," the helicopter radio screamed and he punched the button to Central.

"Davis."

"Yes, sir?"

"What's the time on next of kin identification?" he asked.

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"Twenty-three minutes, sir."

"Make it nineteen. Inform all units."

"Yes, sir."

"Lift off," he growled at the pilot. He threw his eyes out of focus, watching the cars hurtling by the edge of the roof.

I could reach out and touch them—*and have my arm torn off at 100 miles an hour . . .*

He coughed. He always forgot to don his gas mask for the short trip from the elevator to the bird and it always bothered his lungs.

The smog was fortunately thin this morning and he could see the gray that was Manhattan below him. Southward he could make out the spire of the Empire State Building rising forty stories above the cloverleaf around it and beyond that the tower of the Trade Center and the great hulk of the parking lot dwarfing it.

"Hook right," he ordered the pilot, "spin down along the river."

There was a pile-up at the Pier 90 crossover and he saw a helicopter swooping down to pick up the mangled cars at the end of a magnet, swing out across the river to drop them into the New Jersey processing depot.

HE BUZZED the Director as he saw the wrecks piling up in front of the three big crunchers at the depot. They were hammering broken Fords and Buicks into three-foot lumps of mangled steel, spitting them onto the barges. The barges were then being towed out to Long Island Sound for the new jetport. But fast as the crunchers were, they were not fast enough. With a capacity of only 200 cars an hour apiece, they could not keep pace with the rush-hour crackups.

"Yes, Davis," the Director wheezed.

"Would you call U.S. Steel," Davis asked. "We need another cruncher."

"Well, I don't know if we really do—but I'll call."

Davis punched off angrily.

His practiced eye gauged the flow of traffic on the George and Martha Washington Bridges. The cars were eighty feet apart and he ordered a close to seventy-two, effectively increasing the capacity by ten per cent. That was almost as good as another level—but not good enough.

The traffic lane above the piers was packed and smoke from ships was rising between the two twelve-lane sections. Trucks loaded with imports paused for a moment at the top of the ramps were steam catapulted into the traffic. He saw one truck, loaded with what looked like steel safes, hit by a Cadillac, go out of control, hurtle over the edge of the roadway and fall one hundred feet—five levels—to the ground. The safes went bouncing in every direction, slamming into cars on every level. Even two hundred feet above the

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scene he could hear the scream of brakes and the explosions as the autos crashed and burned. He punched for Control.

"Scramble an ambulance to Pier Forty-six, all levels," he said.

He smiled. It was always good to be the first to report an accident. It showed you hadn't fotgotten your training. He had reported four one morning, a record. But now there were bounties for accident reporting and it was rare when a traffic man could actually turn one in. At one time traffic accidents had been reported by the police, but now they were too busy tracking down law violators. An accident was harmful only in that it broke the normal traffic flow.

Traffic was heavy on all levels, he saw—he could actually see only three levels down and there were as many as eight below that—and the main interchange at Times Square was feeding and receiving well. The largest in Manhattan, it spanned from 42nd Street to 49th and from Fourth to Eighth Avenues. There had been protests when construction had started—mostly from movie fans and library fanatics—but now it was the finest interchange in the world, sixteen lanes wide at the 42nd Street off ramp, with twelve exact change lanes. Even the library fans were appeased, he thought: it had been his idea to move the library lions from the old site—they would have been destroyed with the rest of the building had he not spoken—to the mouth of the Grand Central speed lane to Yankee Stadium.

The helicopter banked, headed down the West Side parkway toward the Battery interchange and the Statue of Liberty crossover. It had been clever of the design engineers to use the Bedloe's Island base of the statue for the crossover base—it had saved millions over the standard practice of driving piles into the harbor water. The copper had brought a good salvage price, too.

Of course, the conservationists, the live-in-the-past-people, had objected here, too. But, as always, they were shouted down at the protest meetings. The traffic had to roll, didn't it?

Below the helicopter Manhattan was a seething mass of speeding cars—reds, blacks, blues, and this month's brilliant green against the background of concrete and asphalt. There were quick flashes of brake lights, frightened blurs as a tie rod snapped or a tire blew. Dipping wreckocopters swooped in to pluck cars and pieces of cars from the highways before the lanes jammed. The island was 200 lanes wide at the top, widened to 230 at the base with the north-south lanes over the sites of the old streets running forty feet apart, over, under, and even through the old buildings. It was the finest city in the world, made for and by automobiles. And he controlled, for eight hours a

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day anyway, the destiny of those automobiles. He felt the sense of power he always had here in the helicopter, swooping above the traffic. It passed quickly—it always did—and he was observing clinically, watching the flow.

"There," he said to the pilot, indicated the fifth lane on the pier route. A dull red Dodge was going sixty-five, backing up the traffic for miles. There was no room to pass, and, with the traffic boiling up out of the tunnels and bridges onto the road, a jam was inevitable. "Drop," he ordered, moved behind the persuader gunsight, lined the Dodge in the cross hairs.

He fired and watched the result. The dye marker smashed on the Dodge's hood, glowed for a moment. Warned, the driver moved to a sane 95. But the dye stayed and the driver would be picked up later in the day—the dye was impossible to remove except with Traffic-owned detergent—and sentenced. For first clogging, the fine was only $200, but for later offenses, drivers were banned from the road for five to 100 days, forced to ride the railways into town. Davis shuddered at the thought.

Battery Point and Bedloe's Island looked good and the copter heeled. He used the binoculars to check the Staten Island Freeway, saw that it was down to sixteen lanes coming into New York from the high of twenty-two. The main rush was almost over and he could start preparing for the early lunch rush.

THERE was still a pile up at the Trade Center. The one tower, two had been planned, was standing high above the highways around it, with the great bulk of the parking lot building rising above it, the smog line lapping at the seventy-ninth floor. He saw the red lights in the first 92 floors of the lot signifying full, knew that the remaining 40 floors would not take all of the cars still piling in from the twenty-five feeder lanes. He buzzed Control.

"Yes, sir?" the voice said.

"Davis. Get me Parks and Playgrounds."

"Parks and Playgrounds?" The voice was incredulous.

"Right." He waited and when a voice answered, spoke quickly, did his best to overpower the man on the other end.

"Traffic Manager Davis," he snapped. "I want Battery Park cleared. I'm preparing to dump two thousand cars there in five minutes."

"You can't—"

"The hell I can't! I'm Traffic Manager. Clear the park—"

What there was left of it—the grass fighting for air against the exhaust fumes, dying in the shadow of the interchange above it, stomped to death as the millions of city dwellers flocked to the only

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green in eleven miles—Central Park had been a bastion for a long time but it was too open, too convenient. It was buried now under a rising parking lot and seven levels of traffic. As a concession to the live-in-the-pasters the animal cages had been placed on the parking lot roof and stayed there for two weeks until they had been hit by a drunk in a Lincoln. There had been a minor flap then with the carbon-monoxide drugged animals prowling the ramps until they had been hunted down by motorcyclists.

"What about the people?" Parks and Playgrounds asked.

"Sorry about that. They have four and a half minutes." He punched off, buzzed Beacons and Buzzers.

"Davis," he said. "Re-route Battery Five, ramps two through ten, into Battery Park."

"Right." He buzzed Lower City, ordered Wall Street closed for seven blocks. Later in the day they'd have to reroute the traffic around it. No matter, the tie-up lasted for four hours anyway.

The big pile-up, as always, was at the Empire State building where the main north-south curved twelve lanes out of the way to avoid the huge building. And, as they curved, tires skidded on the pavement, cars clawed to the side and, day after day, car after car lost control on the corner, went plunging over the side to shatter on the ramps below. It was, in many ways, the best show in town and office workers crowded the windows to watch the cars spin out of control. Today the traffic looked almost good and he clocked the pack at 110 on the corner, 115 coming out of it. Still not good enough, though—they were braking coming into the corner, losing time, and the line was thin as they came out of it. He watched a Buick skid, hit the guardrail, tip, and the driver go flying out of the convertible top, land in the level below, disappear in the traffic stream. The car rolled, plummeted from sight.

"Home," he said. The helicopter dropped him on the roof and he gagged against the smog, trotted to the elevator, dropped. The building was shaking from the traffic noise and the hammering of rivets. He coughed on the dust.

HE CHECKED the casualty lists, initialed them. Above normal, with the Empire State section running 6.2% ahead of last week. He was listed as reporting the pier pile-up, and there was a report stating Battery Park was filled—there was also a note saying that the Director was catching hell for parking cars there. To hell with him, Davis thought. There was another complaint to his attention from Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Agnew. Two of their board members were caught in the Wall Street jam and were

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late for work. He threw it into the wastebasket. Outside (inside?)—hard to say with no wall on one side of the building—the workmen were throwing up the steel plates for the ramp, stinting on the bolts to save time.

"Put the damn bolts in," Davis roared. "That thing will shake enough anyway."

The din was tremendous even now, with seven ramps of traffic passing within thirty feet. It would be worse when the spur route was finished. He hoped that they would put the wall back on the office. He buzzed Smith, asked for a readout on the Empire State complex.

"Fourteen fatalities since nine o'clock."

It was now 10:07 and the pre-lunch rush was due to start in four minutes.

"Damn Empire anyway," he said. The United Nations interchange board went red and he went to visual, saw a twelve-car pileup on the fourth level, the bodies and pieces of bodies, the cars and pieces of cars falling into the General Assembly. Damn! he could expect another angry call from the Secretary General. Damn foreigners anyway, when did they get the idea that their stupid meetings were more important than traffic?

The red phone rang—the Director—and he lifted it. "Davis."

"Everything's running higher," the Director wheezed. "What's the story?"

"Empire's the big tie-up," Davis said. "That and some construction."

"Do something. I gave you the authority."

"Get rid of Empire," Davis said. "Get another forty decks on the Trade parking lot, too."

"Can't be done." The hell it can't, Davis thought. You're just afraid of the conservationists. Coward. "Do something."

"Yes, sir." He waited until the phone clicked dead before he slammed it down. He took a deep breath of the air in the office—it was even better than smoking. Then he began to bark orders over the All Circuits channel.

"Scramble another ten wreck-ocopters," he snarled. With half again as many copters, wrecks would be cleared that much faster. "Cut next of kin time to fifteen minutes." He was going out on a limb here, but it would speed the processing of accidents through Brooklyn and New Jersey. Now, with the rush hour just over and another beginning, wrecks were piling up outside the receiving centers and the crunchers were idle half the time. "Up minimum speed five miles an hour." That would make it at least 100 miles an hour on every highway, 65 on the ramps. He flipped to visual, saw Beacons and Buzzers post the new speeds, saw the cars increase speed. Wrecks and Checks flashed the going aloft of the ten copters and

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he breathed easier, flipped to visual at Empire, saw the day's third major pile-up on the third level, cursed. He closed the 34th Street cutoff, ordered three payloaders to dump all wrecks right there, flashed a message to Identification to have a team posted. By midnight, when the traffic eased, they could begin moving the cars and bodies to New Jersey.

The red phone rang, three rings. Double urgent. He grabbed it, barked his name.

"The Director just dropped dead," a hysterical voice said. "You're acting Director."

"I'll be right there." Acting, hell. There were six hours left on his shift and he could get something done now. He turned to Smith. "You're Manager now," he said, "I just got bumped upstairs."

"Right." Smith barely looked up. "Reopen Yonkers Four, lanes one through nine," he said.

He had made the transition from assistant to Manager in an instant. Training, Davis thought.

He took the elevator to the eighth floor, the Director's office. The staff was quiet, looking down at the body on the floor. There were four boards flashing, a dozen phones ringing. Davis snapped orders quickly.

"You, you and you, answer the phones," he said. "You and you, get the boards. You, drag that body out of here. You—" he pointed at the Director's—his—secretary— "call a staff conference. Now."

He looked at the boards, checked Traffic, Beacons and Buzzers, Wrecks and Checks, Gate Receipts and Identification. Fatalities was doing extremely well—Wellborn was the new Manager here. The crunchers were doing well. Wrecks was reporting above normal pickup time.

"The Director's dead," he told the staff. "I'm new Director." They all nodded. "Most departments look pretty good," he said. He looked at Smith. "Traffic flow is lousy," he said. "Why?"

"Empire," Smith said. "We're losing twenty per cent just going around that goddamed building."

"How are your crews fixed for a major job?" Davis asked the Construction Manager.

"Okay." The Manager ticked off eleven small jobs.

"The problem is at Empire," Davis said flatly. "We can't get around the building." He looked at Construction. "Tear it down," he said. "Meeting adjourned."

Later that day he looked south from the roof. The Destruction team had the top ten floors off the Empire State Building and a corner cut of the fortieth floor with a lane of traffic whipping through it. The flow was good and he smiled. He couldn't remember doing anything so necessary before. ★

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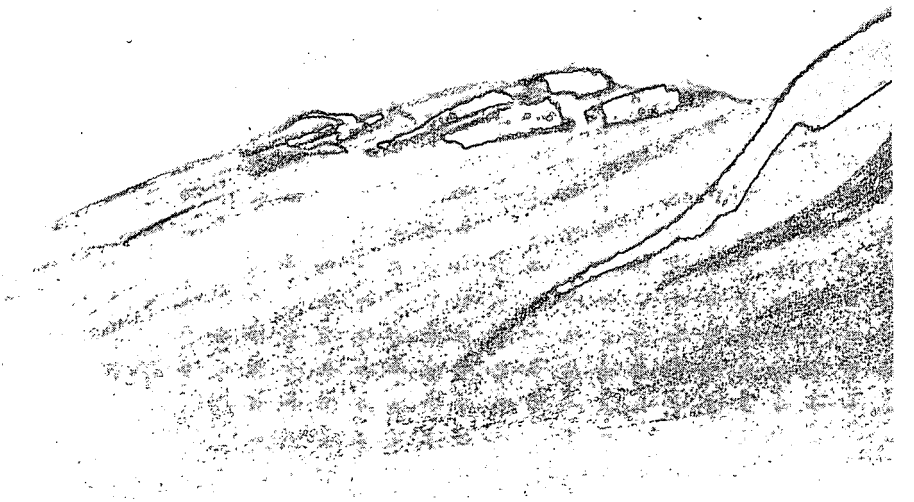
PIÑON FALL



THREE scrawny brown boys found him. It happened in the early part of October when the afternoon sun burned on the backs of the Sangre de Cristo mountains with a kind of transcendent bloodiness. The boys found him on the prairie among the scrub pines.

Whatever he was, he lay crumpled in a sculpted drift of snow without a single vesture of clothing on his body. The snow only partially covered him and by the man's naked flanks the oldest boy could see a delicate orange powder. All three boys halted to stare at the man and to watch their breaths vaporize like skinless balloons.

The boys were brothers. The oldest brother was Jamie, and all three lived in the coal mining town that no longer mined coal. Tucked in an abandoned hollow fifteen miles from the Spanish Peaks, the town was called Huerfano. The

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MICHAEL BISHOP

word means *orphan*, but Jamie spoke the word with little concern for either symbolism or semantics. When they found the angular, blue-jowled creature, Jamie was thinking only of the likelihood of bringing home several pounds of piñon nuts, the hard brown kernels which they had to husk from the sticky cones of the piñon trees. Although the first snowfall had come early, the season for piñon nuts was nearly over.

Jamie raised his quarter-filled fruit jar as a signal to stop, and then the brothers stared back and forth from the blue corpselike body to one another's uncomprehending faces.

"Who is it?" the youngest boy asked.

"Nobody we know," said Jamie. "Put down your jars and watch me —I'm going to see if he's dead."

Tonio, the second brother, pointed and said: "Look at the snow. It's a funny orange color next to hie arms."

Jamie approached and kneeled, his knee sinking gently into the stiffening white drift. He reached across the man's broad forehead

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and touched his oddly parted, blue lips. The two younger boys stepped back.

"He doesn't look like he's breathing," Jamie said, "but his mouth is warm."

"Then he ain't dead, is he?" Tonio asked.

"No. I don't think he is."

The wind blew a bit of the orange powder across the snow and Packie, the youngest boy, scraped at the smears of piñon resin that coated his fingers. Leaning over the man's elongated hairless skull, Jamie very carefully opened his shrouded eyes with a thumb and forefinger.

The huge eyes were black—and faceted.

ON THE edge of the town, a Polish woman lived in the whitewashed wooden house directly across the arroyo from their hovel. Mrs. Zowodny was fat, manlike in appearance and crotchety. She wore coveralls under her monstrously ample dresses and lived among a menagerie of stuffed elks' heads and a brigade of porcelain figurines.

She hovered every day between the kitchen and the murky parlor, as if she could not make up her mind in which direction her appetites would most likely find fulfillment. She called the brothers "blackheads."

She called them blackheads, identified them in her mind with scar tissue and cancerous sores. It was as if the boys were physical blemishes on the sooty complexion of the town, on the old battered face of Huerfano. Jamie frequently pelted her house with clumps of mud or snow, depending on the season, so that she would come to the window, flushed and bulging-eyed, to shout at them.

"You little blackheads! You think you are 'Mericans; you are foreign trash cluttering the streets!"

Then Jamie would bulge out his eyes derisively and shout back the single word: "Slav!" He spat it.

At that he would turn, beckon to his brothers and lead them in a scrambling retreat down the banks of the arroyo that separated their houses. Their arms and legs would flail the air like the blurring plastic spokes of a pinwheel. Fuming, Mrs. Zowodny would watch them go.

Soon neither the old woman nor the boys knew which of the two occurrences had first established their enmity: the coining of the epithet "blackhead" or the ritualistic pelting of Mrs. Zowodny's house. The pelting or the epithet, the epithet or the pelting.

Now it did not matter at all.

JAMIE slapped the man's face. Looking upside down into the opaque, faceted eyes, he could see the image of himself and of his brothers. All three were milky sliv-

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ers of light in the small flat planes and with each slap the angular blue skull moved back and forth in the snow, flattening the snow, communicating a warmth to Jamie's hand.

"Hey, ain't he coming awake now, no?" Tonio asked.

"I don' know, but he's warm; warm as can be."

"He's wearing sompen on his eyes, no?"

"Maybe. They are certainly strange eyes if he isn't," Jamie said. "They are certainly strange."

Packie was standing a little way off in the snow; he put his hands on his knees and leaned forward, cocking his head from side to side.

"Grasshoppers have eyes like that," he said. "And flies, too."

"Yes," Jamie said. "It's hard to tell if he's alive, but he is very, very warm."

With a shudder of gray sinews and an indigo deepening of color the long body took on the sapphire luminosity of a dragonfly turning in the sun. The man's lips parted and he moved one leg, crossing it over his body to cover his exposed knotted groin. All three boys fell back at the movement, scrambling away, struggling in the icy powder. The sun balanced precariously between the Spanish Peaks.

"Please," the man said huskily. "Please cover me."

The boys crept back but Jamie was aware that it would be virtually impossible to establish a rapport with the man, mostly because of the eyes, the terrible eyes. How could one make human contact with eyes that returned one's image in a thousand distorted permutations? How would it be possible to read the character of the entity—human or otherwise—who resided behind those eyes? Jamie stood to his full height, one foot hidden by the broken snow, and looked down into the creature's face. Tonio and Packie stood awed and poker-spined at a small distance.

The eyes, the black, faceted eyes, glinted.

"Please cover me," said the odd mouth, grotesquely forming the sounds. "The snow weights down my own coverings. I can't move."

"I'm going to help you up," Jamie said.

The boy kneeled behind the stricken creature and grasped him beneath his spindly arms. The man's flesh was a uniform grayish blue, crisp to the touch and incredibly warm. His musculature was strangely reticulated: his abdomen seemed almost to consist of hinged segments, the corrugations in the flesh a darker color than the flesh which they apparently hinged. Jamie found it easy to lift the man to a partial sitting position, his body was so light. But then the man cried out in pain, huskily, inarticulately.

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Jamie saw that growing from the man's narrow shoulder blades were the beginnings of two sets of wings. The wings themselves lay outspread and icily laden beneath the sculpted snow. In bringing the creature to a sitting position, Jamie had inadvertently twisted the sensitive membranes of those wings.

"Lay me down again," the creature said. "Lay me down and cover me. Cover me against the cold."

"Hey, brother," Tonio said, "let's get out of here, no? He ain't a real person. He may be sompen else but he ain't no real person."

Jamie took off his coat after easing the naked man back into the snow. Then he wrapped his threadbare woolen muffler around the man's neck, winding it once around his hard constricted chest, and finished by draping the corduroy coat over the man's chest and hips. But the coat was pitifully small and did not begin to cover the man.

"Why don' we move the snow off his wings?" Packie suggested. The boys exchanged bewildered looks and the man lay back in the orange-tinctured snow with nothing whatever alive in his faceted eyes, nothing at all.

MRS. ZOWODNY had been alone all the first day the snow fell. Because her eyesight was failing and because she refused to turn on the electricity, she moved about among her dusty statuary and mildewed elks' heads with a singular clumsiness. Her swollen feet navigated the dark areas between ottomans and overstuffed chairs but only with difficulty. At last she came to the small shuttered window in her kitchen, and paused.

There were colored bottles on the interior sill, above the sink, and ugly glass ashtrays she had no need for; and these items had to be taken down before she could open the peeling shutters. She took them down and ranged them along the edge of the sink.

Outside, the drifts filled her yard, swan-necked peaks that curled like stiffened meringue. Her breath steamed the glass but by squinting she was able to make out the alien thing that was lodged in the snow almost directly under the window, a soft cylindrical shell. She squinted and smacked her lips in consternation.

"Them blackheads," she muttered. "Them blackheads."

The shell was very much like an outsized cocoon. It lay in the snow somewhat lopsidedly, for it was attached by filaments of ice and strands of a glistening silken substance to a long plank; the plank itself embedded in the snow. Mrs. Zowodny looked at the clutter in her yard, smacked her lips again and muttered several words which her thick tongue virtually smothered. With a palsied hand she pushed the shutters to.

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JAMIE and Tonio were kneeling on opposite sides of the outstretched man, scooping up jars of snow and depositing the snow out of the way, behind the man's outstretched arms. Packie sat crosslegged under a piñon tree and continued to worry over the gooey white resin that adhered to his fingers. Beside him was his own widemouthed fruit jar, now brimful of piñon nuts: the two older boys had emptied their jars into his that they might remove the snow from the creature's wings. The creature admonished them.

"Dig very gently," he told them. "Keep your knees back and dig as gently as you can."

In twenty minutes Jamie and Tonio were through. Revealed to them were the soft paperlike membranes of the man's wings. He looked very much like a sallow, whey-faced saint from an El Greco painting, a saint miraculously invested with four diaphanous capes with which to shield his tortured body. The boys gaped and the Sangre de Cristo mountains rose up on the west like a chiseled, living wall of white granite.

"Let me help you up," Jamie said.

He lifted the man to a sitting position for a second time, then awkwardly got him to his narrow, trembling legs. Lifting him, Jamie remarked on the strange creature's astonishing lack of weight; the man seemed to consist only of air and the ethereal burden of his papery flesh. It was then, too, that Jamie noticed that the orange powder on the snow was scaly dust from the man's multicolored wings, the dust that had outlined his flanks.

But the wings were wet, wet from the snow and wet as if they had only recently molted.

"The name that you may call me," the man said, "is Papilio. That is not my given name, nor even an approximation; but it is what you may call me."

"Papilio," Jamie said.

"Yes."

In the failing sunlight the creature Papilio began very slowly to manipulate his wings, moving them back and forth, back and forth, covering and uncovering his naked, manlike body. As he moved them the wings shimmered beneath the emblazoned weight of red and orange peacock eyes. Royal blue hieroglyphics also shimmered with the movement of his wings and the movement was rhythmic. Jamie decided that those hieroglyphics easily could have been the characters of an alien tongue, but he watched the man and said nothing.

"I'm afraid that the sun is dying," Papilio said. "My wings are still damp and I'm hungry, very hungry."

So the boys fed him piñon nuts. They cracked the tiny nuts with their teeth and clumsily shelled them, picking at the hard rinds like

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jewelers working over the mechanisms in a watch. Having shelled the nuts, they gave the sweet white kernels to Papilio and watched him eat.

As he ate his emblazoned wings moved very slowly back and forth, as thin and translucent as Japanese silk screens. Jamie watched the sun and felt the wind.

Clouds were forming above the Spanish peaks, presaging another snowfall.

MRS. ZOWODNY looked out through the frosted kitchen window. Except to putter through the rubble in her own fenced-in yard, she very rarely ventured outside. She had a son who worked construction machinery on the new passes that were being built through the Sangre de Cristo range and this young man brought groceries to the house every Thursday afternoon. Although she bullied him about his personal life, he remained dutiful; and she depended on his visits for the opportunity to rail about the "blackheads" who vandalized the property of such industrious Americans as herself. Soon the young man came only on Thursdays and only to deliver his mother's groceries.

More and more, Mrs. Zowodny was left to the creaking solitude of her house, left to stare at the lacy rime on the windowpanes.

But now she had made up her mind to go out. The thing beneath the kitchen window demanded that she approach someone with authority over the boys who pelted her house and who, apparently, had violated the sanctity of her yard. She put a scarf over her head and with considerable effort squeezed her swollen feet into rubber galoshes. Upon breathing the outside air that rushed coldly into her nostrils, she smacked her lips together in surprise. The front door banged shut on the dusty bric-a-brac within.

In coveralls and a frayed sweater, which she clutched tightly to her middle, Mrs. Zowodny trundled down the snow-blanketed side of the arroyo. Her scarf flapped and her fat upholstered legs sank into the drifts. A solitary magpie watched her from the top of her own picket fence.

Struggling, she came up the gully's opposite bank and negotiated the wire gate and the stepping-stone walkway in the boys' front yard. For her it was a typical *chicano* home, the kind inevitably constructed of mud and plaster, the kind with linoleum strips over the broken-out windows. Breathing through numb lips, she knocked on the door.

The woman who answered the knocking was thin and pale, though her paleness was plainly more the result of a washed-out weariness than of any actual whiteness of the flesh. Mrs. Zowodny squinted at her and the woman in

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the door made a helpless gesture with her left hand. Mrs. Zowodny leaned forward:

"You are the mother? You are the Mrs. Aguilera?"

"Yes."

"And the boys, where are they running at now?"

The helpless gesture with the left hand, made not in response but from weariness.

"You should be keeping a track of where they go and what they did. I raised up a young man of mine own, I did; and you must watch their antics. Yes, you must!"

"They are out for the piñon nuts, Mrs. Zowodny. At two o'clock they left for the piñon nuts."

"They have been dropping their trash at my yard!"

"No," the chicano woman said wearily. "No, Mrs. Zowodny."

For several minutes the two women stood in the fragile warmth of the open doorway and exchanged arguments tinged with wholly disparate kinds of provincialism. Mrs. Zowodny argued heatedly, her lips giving rise to cold balloons, little captions of breath. Mrs. Aguilera lethargically resisted, guarding her doorway. Then the Polish woman's face drew into a contorted parody of itself and she made a hissing sound.

"You think you are a mother. You are a chicano slut!"

"No, Mrs. Zowodny." The woman stepped from the security of her doorway and closed the door behind her. She was wearing only a thin cotton garment, and her face, in profile, was a hard papier-maché mask. Mrs. Zowodny moved instinctively out of her way. The chicano woman strode on the stepping stones to the wire gate and stopped there to look at the Spanish Peaks, two black granite shadows blocking the sun. "No, Mrs. Zowodny," she said.

Both hands reassuringly clutching her frayed sweater, Mrs. Zowodny followed the boys' mother to the gate. But she followed slowly.

Mrs. Aguilera turned.

"It is cold. Last night I had a dream about the snow, a very strange dream. Snow was falling over the whole world. It fell in Colorado and in Mexico. It was falling even on the deserts in Africa. The camels were standing in the snow."

"Camels in the snow?"

"Yes, Mrs. Zowodny. Shaggy, shaggy beasts looking up at the sky and watching the snow fall out of the sun."

Mrs. Zowodny stood three wet stones away from the chicano woman; she ran her raw tongue over the fissures in her lips and blinked, angrily bewildered.

"Do you know what else?" Mrs. Aguilera asked. "There were *mariposas*. All over the world, huge butterflies swam in the white

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storms. And moths, too, shaggy moths that danced among the snowflakes. Moths and butterflies of every color that there is." She stopped and tightened her lips before speaking again. "*Yes*, Mrs. Zowodny."

"Oof!" the other said, registering disgust.

"And tonight the snow will come again. And if I dream, there will be camels in the snow, and butterflies."

"You should stop this dreaming and watch them boys."

"We will need wood for a fire," Mrs. Aguilera said to herself. "We will need wood."

Mrs. Zowodny remembered her rare mission beyond her own yard and drew her face into its doughy self-parody. She let Mrs. Aguilera's last words turn over in her mind. She made up the three stones between them and grasped Mrs. Aguilera's loose, cotton sleeve. Her face twitched.

"You've got an axe? An axe for chopping wood?"

"Yes."

"I will borrow, then, your axe."

Mrs. Aguilera did not argue with the old woman. She found the axe in the empty wood box beside the door and handed it to Mrs. Zowodny by its rusted head. The old woman took the axe in both hands, both visibly shaking hands.

"Thank you," she said. "Send the oldest boy to bring it back—if he don' stay out all night."

Then she left Mrs. Aguilera and crossed the arroyo to her own house, at first hefting the axe across her body and then dragging it by the long worn handle. A magpie flew up when she entered her gate. She could almost feel the sweat on her upper lip crystalizing.

In the back yard she went to the thing under the kitchen window and stared indecisively at its glistening bulk. It glistened with a peculiar whiteness.

Dusk enveloped the house and trees.

At last she brought the axe to her shoulder and let it drop listlessly into the soft integument of the thing. The cocoonlike shell ruptured. Suddenly Mrs. Zowodny's eyes blazed up. Again and again she chopped at the thing, the rusted axe head making clumsy arcs in the failing light. Membranous colors gushed out of the shell and spilled onto the snow, diaphanous capes of orange and scarlet and blue. The plank to which the thing had been attached lay broken in countless splinters.

Mrs. Zowodny was panting. Her armpits ached and the axe fell from her trembling hands into the snow. She looked at her handiwork without comprehension, then went into the house and turned on a single electric light. Still sweating, she sat down in an overstuffed chair and let the shadows move across her doughy face.

It was nearly two hours before

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she got up and went into the back yard to see what she had done.

WHEN the boys came into their own yard it was very late. A few frosted pinpoints of light were visible in the eastern sky but from the other direction came the burgeoning front of snowclouds which massed over the Sangre de Cristo range and spread like a cancer into the regions of clean night sky. Jamie led the boys into the yard. They had returned with only two fruit jars and both were empty and lackluster.

Papilio had refused to venture as far as the house with them and they intuitively understood his reluctance. He had remained in a mine opening several hundred yards beyond their adobe hovel, wrapped in the silken covering of his wings, hiding his nakedness behind those beautiful tapestried membranes. Jamie could still see him placing a piñon nut on his strange indigo tongue, sucking the kernel out of the shell and spitting out the shattered rind—all with merely the efficient workings of his long, papery mandibles. So they had come home with only two fruit jars, both of them empty.

The younger boys went immediately to bed.

Mrs. Aguilera asked Jamie about the piñon nuts, and he told her that he had left the jars in the wood box outside the door. He neither denied nor affirmed their emptiness.

"*Bueno*," the boy's mother said. "Then you know that the wood box is empty. And tonight it will be cold again, with more snow."

"Yes."

"Mrs. Zowodny has borrowed the axe. Go over to her house and bring the axe home. Tomorrow you will go out for the wood."

"Let me go in the morning for the axe, too."

"No. Tomorrow you will have other excuses."

"Why did she borrow the axe? She has a coal furnace."

"I didn't put my nose in her business. Now, go."

Jamie found the stepping stones in the dark, hobbled through the gate and plunged into the piles of drifted snow in the arroyo. He pretended that the snow was a vast hinterland of grassy meadow and clambered through it as if its wetness were a wholy nonexistent quality. He pretended that zebras and wildebeeste lay in wait for him in the grasses of that hinterland. He saw the broken-crusted footprints of a creature that had preceded him, and his heart thumped hard against his chest.

His visions dissolved. The wind chilled him, blowing powdery dust into the air; and he came upon the old woman's dimly lit house with a sense of detached contempt for his fantasies. The house was stolid, compact and real. It seemed to

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heave in the new darkness just as the snow shifted under his feet.

At the whitewashed gate he paused and listened. He heard an odd skittering inside Mrs. Zowodny's house, like the toenails of a tiny dog pattering over linoleum. Jamie turned and peered into the density of blackness from which he had come; what he saw was merely the blurred patina of light that emanated diffusely from the grouping hovels on the other side of the arroyo. But he had heard something distinct from that direction, too.

A scraping on the snow; then a hollow fluttering that was barely audible over the sequent hush and wheezing of the wind. The nap of his corduroy jacket stiffened; he could feel bumplets of chicken flesh puckering in the small of his back. Then a clatter came from the house, a metallic din that diminished into a pattering and died.

Jamie turned rapidly again.

An odor hung in the air. It came into his nostrils with a kind of shocking subtlety, an odor that he knew would assert itself even if the smells of skunk and napthaline were also in the air. He coughed, put his hands over his mouth and walked through the gate toward the noise that he had heard issue from Mrs. Zowodny's house. The porch light was on and the front door stood completely open.

As Jamie entered the house snow began to fall: the stars fell as snowflakes.

In the oppressively warm foyer he waited for his eyes to adjust and wondered about his sudden nervousness. Why had Mrs. Zowodny borrowed an axe when her house possessed a coal-burning furnace? What was the smell that flooded him like the scent of a musty, organic cologne? Why had the old woman's door been open and her porch lamp on? Jamie focused on the outlines of weight and substance that were emerging from the darkness in the parlor.

What finally took shape for him was the hump-shouldered figure of Mrs. Zowodny herself. Her legs were braced in an awkward attempt to spraddle something on the floor and her head was down. The door behind the old woman was open, and Jamie saw past her doubled body into the back yard. Then he looked down. The thing that Mrs. Zowodny was doubled over was very like a sleeping bag from which the lining has been gutted and torn free. Remnants of that lining lay in scaly iridescence on the hard wood floor of both the hallway and parlor. The smell of the glandular perfume was stifling.

Snow whirled into the kitchen and the door behind Jamie slammed shut in the draft. Mrs. Zowodny looked up in the half light and stared at the boy from her huge pouchy eyes. He had arrested her in an action of some importance and she was panting grotesquely from the physical effort

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involved. His own heart pounded uncontrollably; and Mrs. Zowodny's blood-choked eyes blazed as she snarled the familiar epithet.

"You little blackhead! Why do you not knock?"

"The axe," he said, nearly stifling. "The axe."

Mrs. Zowodny's terrible bloody eyes grew larger; and even through his fear Jamie understood that she was no longer looking at him but instead at the gloom that deepened at his back. A rippling movement of air made him simultaneously whirl about and step backward from the door.

As he focused on Papilio's lean blue body and the peacock-eyed draperies of his wings, Jamie heard the rattle of the old woman's stunned voice. This time Papilio's faceted eyes gave back no images.

"She has killed the female of this region," he said.

"Papilio," Jamie said.

"That is not my name," Papilio said.

He strode past the boy, carrying his wings lifted and outspread, an entomological presence who made the walls of the house, the floor and ceiling, contract upon one another like the parts of a shrinking garment. Jamie followed in the cluttered wake of Papilio's wings and watched as the creature placed his segmented hands around Mrs. Zowodny's neck. Her eyes bulged in terror and her fat speckled hands came up feebly, feebly to ward off the grip that was unremittingly carrying her to her knees.

"Stop it!" Jamie screamed.

He found a ceramic figurine on a small end table and brought it down on Papilio's elongated skull, striking him from behind. The odor in the house was now unbearable and he could feel sickness coming on as the supple creature slumped away from the old woman and collapsed into the broken folds of his wings. Mrs. Zowodny opened and closed her mouth like a dying fish; and looking down at her with the base of the shattered figurine in his hand, Jamie saw a cold glint of acknowledgment in the old woman's eyes, just before they closed irrevocably.

"Many others will come," Papilio said. He lay crumpled between an overstuffed chair and the thing which the old woman had dragged in from the back yard. "They are coming now."

The glandular odor was overwhelming. As Jamie looked into the kitchen and into the back yard, he became aware of angular shadows dropping from the sky, threading their way through the multitudinous snowflakes, dropping on outspread capes of blue and scarlet. The snow was full of wings; and the muted whirring that Jamie heard was a universal music.

Somewhere, miles and miles beyond the Sangre de Cristo mountains, camels were standing in the snow. ★

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ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

I WILL FEAR NO EVIL

PART III

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

When medical science cannot let him live as he wants, yet will not let him die, aged but lusty and extremely wealthy Johann Sebastian Bach Smith sets his financial empire in order and assigns his best friend and legal adviser, Jacob Salomon, the task of securing 'a warm body' into which his brain can be transplanted. The operation has never been successfully performed on a human—the situation is further complicated by the fact that the body-donor must belong to an extremely rare blood group.

Johann Smith is literally gambling for death—but the operation proves successful. He recovers to find himself wearing the body of his lovely secretary, Eunice Branca. A dialogue ensues between the brain and the body—highly revealing to both.

Never before have two lives become so strangely and intimately linked. Shock follows shock as Johann Sebastian Bach Smith learns what it means to be a beautiful woman with a zest for life and love—and Eunice discovers the uses of the power his brain wields. Body and brain team up to make a shambles of a court test of Johann's legal identity.

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XVI

JAKE escorted Joan Eunice to her boudoir. Winnie was waiting there—to Joan's annoyance as she thought it possible that Jake's stern character might slip if the upper house were quiet. But she did not show it. "Hi, Winnie!"

"Miss Joan! Are you all right? I've been so worried!"

"Of course I'm all right; Mr. Salomon was taking care of me. Why were you worried, dear?"

"Why, the dreadful things they've been saying about you in the news and there was a riot at the Hall of Justice; I saw it. And—"

"Winnie, Winnie! The idiot box is for idiots; why do you look at it? I was never in danger."

"But she has had a trying day, so you take good care of her, Winnie."

"Oh, I will, sir!"

"And I am tired, too, so I'll say good night and go to bed. After I find a sandwich, perhaps."

"Hubert put a tray in your suite, sir."

"Hubert gets another merit badge. Though to tell the truth, Winnie, I've had a worrisome day myself and it's left me with little appetite and jangled nerves. I may dine on a sleeping pill."

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"Jake dear—"

"Yes, Eunice?"

"Don't take a pill. And do eat."

"But—"

"I know, I'm a bundle of nerves myself. But I know what to do about it—and Winnie and I can soothe your nerves and restore your appetite and make you sleep like a baby."

He cocked one eyebrow, looked at Eunice, then at Winnie. "I think either of you could. But both?"

"Jake, you're a dirty-minded old man; you'll have Winnie blushing. But we can—can't we, Winnie? The Money Hum."

"Oh. Yes, we can, Mr. Salomon."

"Harrumph! Does it involve blood? Or broken bones?"

"Oh, no sir! It's restful. Relaxing."

"I'll try anything once."

Joan said, "But you have to strip for it to—"

"I thought there was a catch."

"Oh, Jake. We'll let you sissy; you can wear shorts. We strip for it; the spiritual effect is better. It's the way we warm up for our exercises. Go undress, then put on shorts and a robe. We'll join you in the Green Suite. Right after it you're going to have a bite to eat and a tepid tub and straight to bed and right to sleep."

"Maybe I'd better bathe first. A day in court leaves me smelling like a skunk."

"You smell all right. Anyhow, Winnie and I have such control by now that we can decide not to be able to smell—or to hear a distracting noise, or anything—if we choose to."

"That's true, Mr. Salomon."

"Okay. Winnie, if she beats me, you protect me. Adios, dears."

"Five minutes, Jake."

As soon as they were alone Winifred said, "You're going to make me strip down bare? Again?"

"I didn't 'make' you strip the first time. And dear Doctor certainly did notice that you were a girl. Looked to me as if the kiss he gave you was better than the one he gave me. Stop blushing. Winnie, you can sissy, too, if you want to—but I *do* need you present. Or Jake will think I'm trying to make him."

"Oh, Mr. Salomon would never think that about *you*."

"He's male. He's as male as dear Doctor. I need chaperonage as all I'm after is to help him sleep without pills. The poor dear has had a dreadful day. Winnie, he was wonderful in court; I'll tell you about it. Later. Let's get these duds off and grab negligees. Modest ones." Joan Eunice stopped suddenly. "Perhaps I've goofed. Winsome? Do you have a date?"

Miss Gersten blushed again. "Uh . . . not until later."

"Paul working late? Sorry—erase and correct. None of my business."

The little redhead continued to blush but she answered steadily, "My business is always your business, Miss Joan. Uh, I'm supposed to take care of you—and I do try! But you feel like a big sister to me."

"Thank you, sweet Winsome. But big sisters should not snoop."

"I've been meaning to tell you. Paul and I have split."

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"Oh, I'm sorry!"

"I'm not. I don't think Paul ever meant to get a dissolution; he was stringing me. But—well, Bob isn't married. Not yet."

" 'Not yet.' Planning on getting married, dear?"

"Well . . . I don't think getting married is something one plans. It just happens. Like thunderstorms."

"You could be right. Sweet, whether it's getting married, or fun and happiness, I hope it's perfect for you. And Bob is such a common name that I can't be tempted to guess. If I don't see him."

"You probably won't. He comes up the service lift and into my rooms from the back corridor —nobody sees him but the guard on duty. And they don't gossip."

"If any guard ever gossips about anything in this house and I find it out, he'll be on Welfare so fast he'll be dizzy. Winnie, the rest of the staff can be human about it. But a guard is in a specially trusted position and must keep his mouth shut. Winnie, if you ever want to see Bob—or anyone—somewhere else, I'll have my mobile guards deliver you and pick you up and even I won't know where."

"Uh . . . thank you. But this is the safest place for us—so few places are safe today. The most that can happen here is that Bob might be embarrassed. *I* wouldn't be embarrassed at all. I'm proud of him!"

"That's the way to feel, dear. As an ex-man I know that's the attitude a man values most in a woman. 'Proud of him.' But let's hurry; we're keeping Jake waiting. If you're going to wear pants, better find some with stretch in them. And thank you for lending me this outfit—turned out that, without the apron and cap, it was still most effective. I had the robe off a while. Tell you later."

IN MOMENTS the girls were hurrying down the corridor to the Green Suite, each just in negligee and bare-footed. At the last instant Winifred had decided that, if her mistress was going to practice meditation in the correct uniform, she would also.

They found the counselor in a bathrobe, looking sheepish. Joan said, "I hope we haven't kept you waiting. Is your tub ready? If not, I'm going to draw it before we start. Then into it and out, don't risk falling asleep. Then—"

"I cheated. I took a quick tub—tepid, as you specified—and ate a little, too."

"Good. Then we'll pop you straight into bed after this and kiss you good night and you'll be asleep before we're out the door. Jake, this is the simplest of yoga, not exercise, just meditation. Controlled breathing, but the easiest sort. Inhale through one repetition of the prayer, hold it through one more, exhale through one, hold through one, and repeat. All of us together, in a triangle. Can you sit in lotus? Probably not unless you've practiced."

"Eunice—"

"Yes, Jake?"

"My father was a tailor. I was sitting in tailor's seat before I was eight. Will that do?"

"Certainly if you are comfortable. If not, any position that lets

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you relax. For you have to forget your body."

"Squatted in a tailor's position I can fall asleep. But what's this prayer?"

Joan Eunice slipped off her negligee, melted down onto the rug into meditation pose, soles upward on her thighs, palms upward in her lap. "It goes like this. Om Mani Padme Hum." (Om Mani Padme Hum. I should have taught Jake this long ago.)

"I know the phrase. 'The Jewel in the Lotus.' But what does it mean to *you*, Joan Eunice?"

Winifred had followed Joan's example as quickly as she set it, was bare and in lotus—and not blushing. She answered, "It means everything and nothing, Mr. Salomon. It is all the good things you know of—bravery and beauty and gentleness and not wanting what you can't have and being happy with what you do have and trees swaying in the wind and fat little babies gurgling when you tickle their feet and anything that makes life good. Love. It always means love. But you don't think about it, you don't think at all, you don't even try not to think. You chant the prayer and just *be*—until you find yourself floating, all warm and good and relaxed."

"Okay, I'll try." He took off his bathrobe, had under it boxer shorts. "Joan Eunice, when did you take up yoga? Winnie teach you?"

"Oh, no!" said Winifred. "Miss Joan taught *me*—she's much farther along the Path than I am."

(Watch it, Boss!) (No huhu, Lulu.) "One learns many things, Jake—and loses them for lack of time. I used to play chess, yet I haven't set up a board for fifty years. But for longer than that I could no longer even attempt a lotus seat . . . until Eunice gave me this wonderful young body which can do anything." (Which shell is the pea under, Eunice?) (It'll be under *you* if you relax too much; you should have emptied our bladder.) (Never fear, dear. I shan't go under, must watch Jake.) "Join us, Jake. You lead, Winnie; start as soon as Jake is in position."

Salomon started to sit on the floor, suddenly stopped and got out of his shorts. Joan was delighted, taking it as a sign that he had decided to give in to it all the way. But she did not let her serene expression change nor move her eyes. Winifred was staring at her navel; if she noticed it, she did not show it.

"Inhale," Winifred said softly. "Om Mani Padme Hum. Hold. Om Mani Padme Hum. Breath out. Om Mani Padme Hum. Hold . . ."

(Om Mani Padme Hum. Dig that clamdigger, dearie?) (Shut up! You'll ruin the mood. Om Mani Padme Hum.)

"Om Mani Padme Hum!" said Salomon in a voice that would have graced a cathedral. "Om Mani Padme Hum!"

"WINNIE darling," Joan said softly. "Let it fade and wake up wide. We're going to have to wake Jake."

The redhead's eyes fluttered, she whispered one more prayer and waited. "Jake, darling," Joan said

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softly. "Eunice is calling. Wake just enough to let us help you into bed. Eunice is calling you back. Jake, dearest."

"I hear you, Eunice."

"How do you feel?"

"Eh? Relaxed. Wonderful. Much rested but ready to sleep. Say, it does work. But it's just autohypnosis."

"Did I even hint that it was anything else? Jake, I don't expect to find God by staring into my belly button. But it does work . . . and it's better than forcing your body with drugs. Now let Winnie and me help you into bed."

"I can manage."

"Of course you can but I don't want the relaxation to wear off. Indulge me, Jake, let us baby you. Please."

He smiled and let them—slid into the opened bed, let them cover him, smiled again when Joan Eunice gave him a motherly good night kiss, seemed unsurprised when Winifred followed her mistress's example—turned on his side and was asleep as the girls left the room.

"Don't bother," Joan said as Winifred started to put on her negligee. "It's my house and no one comes upstairs after dinner unless sent for. Except Hubert and I assume that Jake sent him to bed—Jake knew he would be called on by two tarts in three-quarters time and not much else." She slid an arm around the redhead's slender waist. "Winnie, much as I like to dress up—isn't it *nice* to wear just skin?"

"I like it. Indoors. Not outdoors, I sunburn so badly."

"What about at night? When I was a boy, ages and ages ago, it got unbearably hot in July and August where we lived—the sidewalks used to burn my bare feet. Houses were bake ovens even at night—no air-conditioning. An electric fan was a luxury most people did not have. Nights when I couldn't sleep because of heat I used to sneak quiet as a mouse and bare as a frog out by the back door, being oh, so careful not to let my parents hear, and walk naked in the dark, with grass cool on my feet and the soft night breeze velvet on my skin. Heavenly!"

"It sounds heavenly. But I would be terrified of getting mugged."

"The word 'mug' hadn't been invented, much less any fear of it. I was a middle-aged man before I became wary of the dark." They turned into the master bedroom. "Kiss me good night, Winsome, and go keep your date. Sleep late in the morning; I'm going to."

"Uh, my date isn't until after midnight. Aren't you going to tell me what happened today?"

"Why, of course, dear. Thought you might be in a hurry. Come take a bath with me?"

"If you want me to. I bathed after dinner."

"And you have your face on for your date. I bathed this morning but that seems a week ago. Sniff me and tell me just how badly I stink."

"You smell all right. Luscious."

"Then I'll let it go with toothbrush and bidet and a swipe at my armpits; I'd rather go to bed."

"You haven't had dinner."

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"Not all that hungry. Just happy. Is there milk in my bedroom fridge? Milk and crackers is all I want. Want to join me with a glass for yourself and get crumbs in bed and talk girl talk? Things I can't mention to dear Jake now that I'm a girl and not mean, old, cantankerous Johann."

"Joanie, I don't believe you ever were cantankerous."

"Oh, yes—I was, hon. I hurt most of the time and was depressed all of the time and wasn't fit to live with. But Joan Eunice is never depressed; her bowels are too regular. Scrounge us two glasses of milk and a box of crackers while I take a pretend bath. Don't go downstairs; there will be something over there in the iron rations. Fig newtons, maybe, or vanilla wafers."

SOON they were sitting, munching in the big bed while Joan Eunice gave an edited account of the day: "—so we visited in Judge Mac's chambers and let the car go on ahead, as Judge Mac, the sweet darling, wouldn't hear of my leaving through the streets. Even though the phony riot was over. Then we switched from copter to car at Safe Harbor and came home." (Protecting her 'innocence,' twin?) (Not bloody likely. Protecting Jake's reputation.)

"But the best part of the day was when I took off that street robe and let 'em look at that Acapulco outfit you dressed me in. Made 'em go ape, dear."

"'Ape?'"

"Out-of-date slang. They dropped one wing and ran in circles, like a rooster about to tread a strange hen."

"It wasn't the outfit, it was you."

"Both. Eunice Branca had a heavenly body and I'm doing my best to justify it. With your help. As may be, both those darling men kissed me the nearest thing to rape I've encountered."

"Better than Doctor Garcia?"

"I don't think Doctor Garcia gave me his all-out best. I think he was inhibited by surprise and by the presence of a red-headed nurse I could name. But these two weren't inhibited and had a couple of drinks in them and each was doing his darnedest to do better than the other one. *Whew!* Winnie, I do not exaggerate—if Jake hadn't been there, I think they would have had me down on the rug for a gang bang in two seconds."

"Uh . . . would you have struggled?" (Going to be truthful, tart?) (Who taught me to be a tart? Any reason not to tell her, Eunice?) (None. Except that she's likely to rape you herself.) (Oh, pooh, she's just killing time till her date.) Don't say I didn't warn you.)

"Winnie, if I were a real lady, I would be horrified. But I won't pretend with my chum. I don't know much about being female but I seem to have strong instincts. Cross my heart, if either of those sweet men had given me a gentle shove, I would have landed on that rug with my legs open and eyes closed. Gang bang? By then I felt ready to take on a regiment."

Winfred said thoughtfully, "It happened to me once."

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"A *regiment*?"

"No. A gang bang."

"Well! Let's shoo the crumbs out of bed and squeeze down the lights and snuggle and you tell big sister. Were they mean to you?"

"Not really. Oh, dear, I'm blushing already. Turn off everything but one floor light and let me tell it against your neck."

"That better?"

"Yes."

"Now tell Mama."

"Uh, it was the night I graduated from training. I wasn't a virgin—I'm not sure there was a virgin in my class. But this was something else. Some interns gave a party for some of us. That was fine and I expected one of them to get me alone. Interns are the horniest people and a girl didn't accept a date with one unless she meant business. But the party was loads of champagne and no food. Joan, I had never had champagne before."

"Oho! I can write the ending."

"Well . . . champagne doesn't *taste* strong. I sopped up a lot of it.

"Then I was in bed and it was happening. Wasn't surprised and tried to cooperate. But things went vague. I noticed that he wasn't dark-haired after all; he had hair as red as mine. When I had been certain that he was dark-haired and had a moustache. When I noticed later that he was almost bald, I realized that something odd was going on. Joan, there were seven interns at that party. I think all of them had me before morning. I don't know how many times. I knew what was happening after thick, curly red hair was replaced by mostly bald. But I didn't try to stop it. Uh . . . I didn't *want* it to stop. A nympho, huh?"

"I don't know, dear, but that's the way I felt late this afternoon. Wanted it to happen at last, wanted it to go on happening—and I don't even know what it feels like. Go on."

"Well, it did go on. I got up once and went to the bathroom and noticed in the mirror that I didn't have a stitch on and couldn't remember having undressed. Didn't seem to matter. I went back to bed, and found that I was feeling lonely; the party seemed to have stopped.

"Only it hadn't. A man came in and I managed to focus my eyes and said, 'Oh, Ted! Come here.' And he did and we did, and it was worse than ever.

"I woke up about noon with a dreadful hangover. Managed to sit up and here were my clothes, neatly folded on a chair, and on the bedside table a tray with a thermos of coffee and some Danish pastry and a glass with a note by it. It read: 'Drink this before you eat. You'll need it. Chubby.' Chubby was the one who was almost bald."

"A gentlemen. Aside from his taste for mass rape."

"Chubby was always nice. But if anybody had told me that I would ever be in bed with Chubby, I would have laughed in her face."

"Were you ever again?"

"Oh, yes. I really did appreciate the thoughtful little breakfast and especially the hangover cure. It put me back together. Not good

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enough to go on watch but good enough to get dressed and back to my room."

"Were you all right? I mean, uh, not caught or anything?"

"Not even sore. Not anything. Wasn't my time, even if I hadn't been protected with an implant, which I was. And one nice thing about going to bed with interns, almost no chance of picking up an infection. No, I was lucky all the way, Joan. Oh, no doubt the story went the rounds—but I wasn't the only graduate getting it that night and that wasn't the only party. Nobody teased me about it. But it was a gang bang and I didn't make the slightest move to stop it." She added thoughtfully, "The thing that worries me is that I might do it again. I know I would. So I don't drink at all any more. I know I can't handle it."

"Why, Winnie, you've had a drink with me, more than once."

"That's not the same thing. Uh, if you wanted me to get drunk with *you*—I would. I'd be safe." (Safe! Little does she know.) Eunice, we haven't done more than snuggle and you know it.) (She's asking you to step up the pace.) (Well, I won't! Not much, anyhow.)

"WINNIE! Winnie dear! Look at the time."

"Uh? Oh, my heavens! Ten minutes after midnight. I—" The little redhead seemed about to cry.

"Are you late? He'll wait. Oh, I'm sure he will—for Winnie."

"Not late yet. He's off duty at midnight and it takes a while to get here. But— Oh, dear, I don't want to leave *you*. Not when we were—I was, anyhow—so happy."

"Me, too, darling," Joan agreed, gently untangling herself from Winifred's arms. "But big sister is always here. Don't keep your man waiting. Check your lipstick and hair and such in my bath if there is any chance that he may already be in your room."

"Well. All right. Miss Joan, you're good to me."

"Don't you dare call me 'Miss' at a time like this or swelp me, I'll make you miss your date. Rush, rush, hon; go get beautiful. Kiss me good night; I'll be asleep before you are out of the bath. And, Winsome—no exercises tomorrow."

"But—"

"Smile, I didn't break your dolly. I want to sleep late and I want *you* to sleep late so that I won't wake up from knowing you are fidgeting. You'll get all the classic postures you need in bed tonight. Stop blushing. Give him something special from me, only don't tell him. Or do, I don't give a darn. Kiss me quick, and let me go to sleep."

Her maid-chum-nurse kissed her not too quickly and left hurriedly. Joan Eunice pretended to be asleep when Winifred walked silently from the bath through the room, on into her own room, and the door sealed behind her.

(Well, twin, you lucked through again, didn't you?) (Eunice, I've told you time and again that I am *not* going to stroll Gay Street while I'm a virgin. Might be habit-forming.) (Could be, with our cuddly little pet who enjoys a gang

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bang. But I didn't mean *her*. I meant at Safe Harbor.)

(You call that *luck*? I call it the most frustrating thing that ever happened to me. Eunice, I needed the Money Hum as badly as Jake did.) (I call it luck. Boss darling, I may be dead but I can still read a calendar. I was steady on twenty-eight-and-a-half days for more than ten years—and we've still been on it since we amalgamated. We're fertile as a turtle, Myrtle, this minute—and will be, for two or three days. Jake promised you that the next time won't be frustrating . . . and you'll be as carefree as a cheerleader I told you about. Scan me, Fanny? So run, don't walk, and get that implant—about ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Unless you plan to get us benched right away. Do you?)

(Eunice, you're talking non—No, you're not. I *will* do something about it. Tomorrow. But 'benched right away' is an exaggeration. I'm new at this while you've been through one pregnancy. But your aunt probably watched you like a hawk—) (She did. Elsie Dinsmore had a livelier time.) (—but I've sat through three, as a husband. 'Benched' is just a short time at the end. And pregnancy doesn't kill a woman's interest. My angelic first wife Agnes would have tried it on the way to the hospital if I hadn't had more sense about it than she had. Just the same, I'll be good. I'll be careful, rather.)

(Joan, I wasn't trying to talk you out of it. I just didn't want us knocked up by accident. Say through a playful romp with Judgie Wudgie. Or Alec. But if you want, that's fine. Marry Jake and get pregnant at once. Or get pregnant by him and then marry him; he might be more tractable.)

(Eunice, I'm not planning on getting married in any hurry if at all.) (So? I've heard you propose to Jake at least four times.)

(Yes, yes! If Jake agreed, I would; I wouldn't let him down. But he won't, if ever, until these legal finagles are cleared up. Which might take years. Do you remember how long it took to get the courts to okay the Sky Trails stock conversions? That was clear-cut compared with this and did not involve as much money. Eunice, I propose to Jake for his morale; I don't care whether he makes an 'honest woman' of me or not, I just want him to take us to bed. Marriage doesn't figure.)

(Twin, your naiveté surprises me. Didn't you hear Winnie? Marriage isn't planned, it just happens. No girl is more likely to wind up in a hotel room, married to a man she didn't even know at sundown the night before, than a chick who isn't going to get married 'any time soon.' Boss, you marry Jake. Marry him as soon as he will agree to it—for you were talking sense when you pointed out that no other man could both understand you and not be dazzled by your money. In the meantime, it's smart to go contra.)

(All right. What are the girls using today?) (Oh, most of them use implants. Some use pills, both the daily ones and the month-

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ly ones. But if you miss with either sort, you are on a very short fuse. I never liked monkeying with my body's economy; I'm not convinced that anything that changes a woman's femaleness that much is a good idea. Not superstition, Boss, I did some careful reading after the time I got caught. There are hazards to all chemical methods. My body worked fine the way it was; I didn't want to tamper with a successful organization—I'm quoting you, only you were talking about business.) (I see your point, Eunice, even though we're talking about monkey business. A body is far more complex than a corporation, and the one you turned over to me is a jewel; I don't want to tamper with it, either. But what *did* you use? Self-restraint?)

(Never had any in stock, dearie. Oh, there are lots of other loving things you can do without getting pregnant—if you can shake off your early training and be twenty-first century—) (Look, infant, I knew about—and used—every one of those other things in high school. I keep telling you: You kids did *not* invent sex.) (You didn't let me finish, Boss. Those are emergency measures. A girl who depends on them alone is going to add to the population explosion. Joan, I looked into it carefully when I turned eighteen and was licensed . . . and settled on one of the oldest methods. A diaphragm. They are still available; any physician will fit them. I wore one six days every month, even at the office—because, as the doctor pointed out, most diaphragm failures result from leaving them at home while you run out for pound of sugar, be right back.)

(I suspect he's right, Eunice.) (I'm sure of it, Joan. I never liked them—I never liked *any* contraception; I seemed to have a deep instinct that told me to get pregnant. Boss . . . the thing—the *only* thing—that I really mind about being dead . . . is that I always wanted to have a baby by you. And that's silly, as you were already too old—or maybe almost too old—when I first met you. But I would have tried if you had offered.)

(Darling, darling!)

(Oh, I'm happy with what I have. Om Mani Padme Hum. I'm not kicking about my karma. I'm not just content, I'm *happy* . . . to be half of Joan Eunice.)

(Eunice, would you still be willing to have a baby by me?)

(What? Boss, don't joke about it. Don't mock me.)

(I'm not joking, beloved.)

(But, Boss, the necessary part of you is *gone*. Pickled in alcohol, or something.)

(They use formalin, I think. Or deep freeze. I'm not talking about that old wreck we discarded. We can go down and get an implant.)

(Huh? I don't understand.)

(Do you remember a tax-deductible called the Johanna Mueller Schmidt Memorial Eugenics Foundation?)

(Of course. I wrote a check for it every quarter.)

(Eunice, despite the purposes set out in its charter, the only *real* purpose does not appear in the fine print. When my son was killed

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I was already fairly old. But I was still virile—potent—and tests showed that I was fertile. So I got married—I think I told you—to have another son. Didn't work. But I had my bet hedged and never told anyone. Sperm bank deposit. In the cryogenic vault of the Foundation is a little piece of Johann. Hundreds of millions of extremely little pieces, that is. Presumably they are not dead, just asleep. That's what I meant by an implant. With a syringe. Or however they do it.

(Eunice? Are you still there?) (I'm crying, Boss. Can't a girl cry happy? *Yes*!)

(Tomorrow morning, then. You can change your mind up till the last minute.)

(I'll *never* change my mind. I hope you won't.)

(Beloved.)

XVII

NEXT morning Joan found that Jake had left the house before she woke; there was a note on her tray:

"Dear Joan Eunice,

"I slept like a baby and feel ready to fight wildcats—thanks to you and Winnie. Please extend my thanks to her and say (to both of you) that I will most gratefully join your prayer meetings any time I am invited—especially if I've had a tiring day.

"I will not be back until late—treasure hunting, locating links of evidence. Alec is off to Washington for one link. If you need me, call my answering service or Judge McCampbell's chambers.

"I've instructed Jefferson Billings to let you draw against your petty expenditures account—about four hundred thousand in it, I believe—on your old signature and new thumb print. He'll pay drafts and hold them and I'll countersign until you make out a new signature & thumbprint card—he says he knew Eunice Branca by sight, no problem. If you wish, he will call on you with a new sig-print card—we assume that your signature is now somewhat changed."

(Boss, I guess Jake doesn't know that I sign your signature better than you do.) (I don't think anyone knows, dearest. I don't know how that would figure in court—for us, or against us?)

"If you need more pocket money, let me make you a personal loan rather than have it show in my conservator's report. Your "Brother Mac" is most helpful, but the financial end of this nonsense should appear ultra-conservative until such time as he can, with full justification, relieve me as your conservator. Caesar's wife, you know.

"Speaking of Caesar's wife, I told you a chuckle about two of our friends. This morning I phoned one of them and the other answered and, after the usual query as to sight & sound security, they seemed unworried about what I saw or heard or might infer. I was flattered. Little imp, if you must *misbehave, you can trust them—for they have your welfare at heart. Sorry I was stuffy yesterday."*

(I'm glad to learn *that*, Boss.)

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(Eunice, I can't see that it's our business what Alec and Mac do in their spare time. Jake shouldn't gossip about them, even to us.) (No, no, Boss! Jake is telling you that he was being a cube yesterday —and he's sorry—and now he's granting you absolution in advance. We had best marry Jake—nevertheless I've fretted that Jake might be jealous. Possessive. His age, his background. Could be doom, twin—as you are a tart at heart and we both know it.)

(Oh, nonsense, Eunice! I would never rub Jake's nose in it—and anyhow you're wrong. A smart man—which Jake is—doesn't get excited over a go on the tiles; what worries him is fear of losing a wife he values. If Jake marries us, I will *never* let him worry about losing us.) (I hope you can make that stick, Boss honey.) (With your help I'm sure I can. Let's finish his letter—)

"Don't count on me for dinner, as what I must do today is urgent —more urgent than something that seemed dreadfully urgent yesterday. And was. And will be, I hope.

"This was meant to be a love letter but I've had to mention other matters—and other people, so I must urge you to tear it up and flush it down the W.C. It is no accident that I am thumb-printing the seal and will hand it to Cunningham with a promise to have his head on a platter if it leaves his person before it reaches you. I've learned to like Cunningham; he's an 'honest thief.'

"My love to you, dearest, and the biggest kiss possible—so big that you can break off a piece and deliver it to Winnie when you thank her for me. She's a charming girl, and I'm pleased that she's mothering you so well.

"J."

(Why, the horny old bastard. Joan, Jake has his eye on Winnie's pretty tail while he's patting ours.) (She'll have to stand in line!) (*Jealous*, twin?) (No. But I repeat—I'm going to scalp him first. Darn it, Eunice, I had him all set yesterday —and it's been a long struggle. Not the Whim-Wham-Thankee-Ma'am *you* managed with him. And all it got me was a spanking. I do hope he comes home tonight.) (Three hurdles even if he does, twin.) (*Three*?) (Hubert... and Winnie... and that 'implant.' Boss darling? You're not going to do me out of having *your* baby by letting Jake get at you first—are you?) (Of course not, little stupid. I was coping with intrigues without getting shot long before your grandmother was born. Mmm—I'll need cash.)

(Jake told you how to get all the cash you want.) (Oh, sure—on my signature and *his* countersignature. Like a cat covering up on linoleum. Eunice my love, I'll bet you never paid a bribe in your life.) (Well... not with *money*.) (Don't tell me, let me guess. Hon, what we're sitting on might be worth a million—but today I need used bills in medium denominations from no recorded source. Come along, little snoopy, and I'll show you something that even my secretary—a sweetly deceitful girl named Eunice, remember her?—

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didn't know anything about.)

(Do you mean that safe hidden in your bath, Boss?) (*Huh*? How the hell did *you* know about *that*?) (I'm snoopy.) (Do you know the combo?) (I ought to take the Fifth.) (Why bother? You'll know it in two minutes. Or can you pick it out of my mind?) (Boss darling, you know by now that *I* don't know anything in your memory until *you* think about it... and *you* don't know anything in mine until *I* think about it. But— Well, if I had to open that safe, I think I would start with the numbers that mean your mother's birthday.)

Joan sighed. (A girl doesn't have any privacy these days. All right, let's see if we've been robbed.)

SHE went into her bath, sealed the door, bolted it by hand, removed a stack of towels from a lower cabinet, fiddled with the ceiling of the cabinet; the back panel slid aside, disclosing a safe. (You think my mother's birth date will open it?) (I'd switch on the sun lamps over the massage table first, then run the cold water in the hand basin.) (No privacy at all! Honey, did you really pay a bribe with your pretty tail once?) (Not exactly. I just improved the situation. Let's see if we've been robbed.)

Joan opened the safe. Inside was money enough to interest a bank auditor. But the packets had not been packaged in a bank; they were not that neatly jogged and the total for each was hand printed. (Plenty of moola, dear—and either nobody found this safe or they never figured out the additional bolts. Either way, it settles one thing. We won't put Jake's sweet note down the hopper.) (Let him think we did, huh?) (If he asks.) (Then cry on him later and admit that we couldn't bear to part with it.) (Eunice, you have a mind like a pretzel.) (That's why it fits so well into yours, twin.) (Could be.)

Joan put the letter inside, took out two packets, put them in a purse into the dressing-room end —closed the safe, shut off the sun lamps, shut off the water, spun the dial, slid the panel back, replaced the towels, closed the cabinet. Then she stepped to the bath's intercom, pressed a touchplate. "Chief O'Neil."

"Yes, Miss Smith?"

"I want my car, one driver and both Shotguns in thirty minutes."

There was a short silence. "Uh, Miss Smith. Mr. Salomon apparently forgot to mention that you would be leaving the house."

"For excellent reason. He did not know it. Did he mention that I am no longer a ward of the court? If not, have you learned it from some other source?"

"Miss, I haven't learned it from an *official* source."

"I see. Then you are learning it from me. Officially."

"Yes, Miss."

"You don't sound happy, O'Neil. You could check by phoning Judge McCampbell."

"Why, yes, of course."

"Are you going to, O'Neil?"

"Perhaps I misunderstood, Miss. Weren't you telling me to?"

"Are you recording?"

"Certainly, Miss. I always do, with orders."

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"I suggest that you play it back and answer your own question. I'll hold. But first—how long have you been with me, O'Neil?"

"Seventeen years, Miss. The last nine as your Chief."

"Seventeen years, two months, and some days. Not enough for maximum retirement but it has been long, faithful, and unquestioning service. You can retire this morning on full pay for life, if you wish, O'Neil; faithful service should be appreciated. Now please play back while I hold." She waited.

"Be switched, Miss—I must need a hearing aid. You didn't *tell* me to call the Judge. You just said I *could*."

"That is correct. I pointed out that you could check on what I told you—officially—by making such a call. You still can."

"Uh, Miss, I don't see what you are driving at."

"I'm sure you can figure it out. Do you wish to retire today? If so, send up Mentone; I want to interview him."

"Miss, I've no wish to retire at all."

"Really? You gave the impression that you were looking for another job. Perhaps with Mr. Salomon. If so, I do not want to stand in your way. Retirement at full pay is available to you, O'Neil."

"Miss, I like it here."

"I'm pleased to hear it. I hope you will stay for many years. O'Neil, have you ever discussed my comings and goings with anyone?"

"Only when you've told me to, Miss. In which case I always have your order to do so on tape."

"Fine. Wipe this tape and I'll hold while you do so."

Shortly he said, "Wiped, Miss Smith."

"Good. Let's start over. Chief O'Neil, this is Miss Johann Sebastian Bach Smith speaking. I want my car, one driver, and both Shotguns in thirty minutes."

"They will be ready, Miss Smith."

"Thank you. I'll be shopping. Is there anything I can pick up for Mrs. O'Neil?"

"That's most kind of you, Miss. I don't think so. Shall I ask her?"

"If you do, it is only necessary to say that my *car* is going out. If she has a list, I'll be happy to have Fred or Shorty take care of it. Off."

(Boss, you scared the pee out of him. Was that nice?) (Running a feudal enclave in the midst of a nominal democracy isn't easy, Eunice. When Johann said 'Frog' everybody hopped—my security boss especially. O'Neil has got to know—they've *all* got to know—that Johann is still here... and that no one, not even darling Jake, reviews or vetoes what I say. Unless he marries us, in which case I'll go female and let him decide everything.) (That'll be the day!) (I might, dear one. Tell me, did you obey Joe?) (Well... I never bucked him. I suppose you could say I obeyed him. Except that I fibbed, or sometimes kept my mouth shut.) (I'd do just about the same. I think a perfect arrangement would be to do exactly what a man tells me to do... but wangle it so that he tells me to do what

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I've already decided to do.)

Joan felt, rather than heard, her chuckle. (Boss, that sounds like a recipe for a perfect marriage.)

(I find I like being female. But it's different. Now what shall we wear?)

JOAN settled on a bandeau, a knee skirt, an opaque cloak with hood and yashmak, plus low-heeled sandals, all in subdued colors. She was ready in less than thirty minutes.

(How's our face, Eunice?) (Okay for a shopping trip. No need to call Winnie; the little baggage probably hasn't had much sleep.) (Nor do I want to call her; she might want to come along. Let's go, sweet—we're out to break a two-thousand-year record with no help from the Holy Ghost.) (Boss, that's not a nice way to talk!) (Well, I'll be frimped! Eunice, I thought you weren't a Christian? Zen. Or Hinduist. Or some such.)

(I'm not any of those things, Boss. I simply know some useful spiritual disciplines. But it is rude to joke about anything someone else holds holy.) (Even in my *mind*? Are you telling me what I must not *think*? If I could reach you, I'd spank you.) (Oh, you can say anything to *me*, Boss—just don't say such things out loud.) (I didn't and don't and never have. Quit nagging me.) (Sorry, Boss. Love you.) (Love *you*, little nag. Let's go get knocked up.) (*Yes*!)

She took the front lift to the basement; O'Neil met her and saluted. "Car is ready, Miss—and both drivers and both Shotguns."

"Why both drivers?"

"Well, Finchley should be on call. But Dabrowski is bucking my authority a touch. Claims he's senior to Finchley. Do you wish to settle it?"

"Of course not; *you* must. But perhaps I can smooth some feathers."

"Yes, Miss."

He conducted her to her car; both teams were lined up by it, they saluted in unison. She smiled at them. "Good morning, friends. I'm glad to see you all looking so well. It's been a long time."

Dabrowski answered for them, "It has indeed, Miss Smith—and we are glad to see *you* looking so well."

"Thank you." Her eyes traveled across them. "There is one thing no one has told me... about the tragedy that started this strange sequence of events. Which team was driving the night Mrs. Branca was killed?"

For a long moment no one spoke. Then O'Neil answered, "Finchley and Shorty had the duty that night, Miss Smith."

"Then I must thank them—for Mrs. Branca and for myself. Although I know that Dabrowski and Fred would have acted as bravely, as promptly." She looked at Finchley, then at Shorty, her face unsmiling but serene. "Which one of you avenged Eunice? Or was it both of you?"

Finchley answered. "Shorty got him, Mrs.—Miss Smith. Bare hands, one chop. Broke his neck."

She turned to Shorty—six feet six of smooth-black soul, two hundred ninety pounds of sudden

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death—and a preacher in his time off. She looked up at him and said gently, "Shorty, from the bottom of my heart—for Eunice Branca—I thank you." (I *do* thank him, Boss! This is news to me. I was dead before that lift opened.) "If she were here, she would thank you—not just for herself but for other girls that killer will never kill. I'm glad you killed him in the act. If he had gone to trial he might be out by now. Doing it again."

Shorty had said nothing up to then. "Miss— Finch got 'im, too. Zapped him. Couldn't rightly say which one got him first."

"Nor does it matter. Any of you four would have protected Mrs. Branca with your life. She knew it—and knows it, wherever she is. I know it, and Chief O'Neil knows it." Joan felt tears start, let them flow. "I—all of us—wish to Heaven she had waited indoors until you two arrived. I know that each of you would rather see me dead than her. I ask you to do me the honor of believing that I feel the same way. Shorty, will you say a prayer for her tonight? For me? I don't know much about praying." (Damn it, Boss, you've got me crying.) (Then say a Money Hum. For Shorty. He's still blaming himself for the unavoidable.)

"I will, Miss. I have every night. Although—Mrs. Branca—doesn't need it. She went straight to Heaven." (So I did, Boss. Though not the way Shorty thinks.) (And we shan't tell him. Have I said enough?) (I think so.)

Joan said, "Thank you, Shorty. For me, not for Eunice. As you say, Eunice doesn't really need prayers." She turned to O'Neil. "Chief, I want to go to Gimbel's Compound."

"Certainly, Miss. Uh, Finchley, man the car. Both Shotguns." O'Neil helped her in, locked her in; she locked herself in. The armor door lifted and the big car rolled out into the street. (Joan, what in the world are you going to buy at Gimbel's?) (A gag. For you. I'll change that order in a moment. Eunice, where did you buy clothes? You were the most smartly dressed gal in town—even when you were the nakedest.)

(Pooh, I was never naked; Joe's designs made all the difference. Joan, where I shopped you would never shop.) (Can't see why not.) (Johann might but *you* can't; it wouldn't do. Mmm... while I could not afford the stylish places, I know of them. Come to think of it, two of them lease space inside Gimbel's Compound.) (So that's where we'll go—second. I'll tell Finchley the change... and tell him to have Fred escort me; I think Fred feels left out.) (Wups! Fred can read.) (So? *Oh*! Well, Fred can guard me later.) She thumbed the order switch.

"Finchley?"

"Yes, Miss?"

"I got so preoccupied that I forgot one other stop. Please drop Shorty and me at the unloading zone where State passes over Main."

"State and Main, Miss."

"Please have Shorty hang the radio link on his belt; there's no parking around there. Or was not the last time I was down town.

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How long has that been? Over two years."

"Two years and seven months, Miss. Sure you don't want both Shotguns with you?"

"No, they can take turns staying with the car. If you have to get out, I want you covered."

"Oh, I'll be all right, Miss."

"Don't argue with me. You wouldn't have argued when I was old Johann Smith; I assure you that *Miss* Johann Smith still has his poison fangs. Pass the word along."

She heard him chuckle. "I'll do that, Miss Smith."

WHEN the car stopped, Joan hooked up her yashmak, concealing her identity—either or both of them—from the curious. Shorty unlocked her and handed her out. On the crowded pedestrian walk of Main Street Joan felt suddenly vulnerable... except for the tower of strength beside her. "Shorty, the building I'm looking for is in the thirteen hundred block—thirteen-oh-seven. Can you find it?" The question made him feel useful; she knew where the Roberts Building was, she owned it.

"Oh, sure, Miss—I read numbers real good. Letters, too—just words bother me."

"Let's go then. Shorty, how do you manage in your real profession? Not being able to read the Bible, I mean."

"No trouble, I use talking books—and as for *the* Book, I got every precious word memorized."

"A remarkable memory. I wish I could say the same."

"Just takes patience. I had the Book down pat while I was still in prison." He added thoughtfully, "Sometimes I think I ought to learn to read... but I can't seem to find *time*." (The poor dear probably never had a teacher who could teach, Boss.) (Never tamper with a successful organization, Eunice; he's found his niche.)

"This must be it, Miss. 'One, three, oh, seven.'"

"Thank you, Shorty." She was not asked for her ID at the building entrance, nor did she offer it, for she had none, either as Johann Smith or Eunice Branca. The guard noted the "Licensed & Deputized" shield (which matched his own) on Shorty's uniform, released the cage turnstile and waved them on through. Joan Eunice smiled at him with her eyes—and made note that security at the Roberts Building should be tightened; the guard should have photographed Shorty's ID and logged his shield number. (Boss, he *can't* handle so many people that way; he has to use his judgment.) (Look who's talking! If that apartment house you used to live in had had tight security, you would never have been mugged. If we can't stop violence outdoors, we must try to keep it from coming indoors.) (I won't argue, Boss darling—I'm *excited*!) (Me, too; this veil is a help.)

On the twelfth floor they went to the suite occupied by the Johanna Mueller Schmidt Memorial Eugenics Foundation, H.S. Olsen, M.D., Sc.D., Director, Please Ring and Wait. The guard let them in, went back to his picture

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magazine. Joan noted with approval that there was a goodly number of women and couples in the waiting room. She (Johann) had jacked up Olsen about the (public) purpose of the Foundation—to offer superior anonymous donors to licensed and qualified females—in her last letter accompanying a quarterly check; apparently it had had good effect.

"Wait here, Shorty; there's video over there."

She went to the barrier desk separating the waiting room from the outer clerical office, avoided the sign "Applications" and got the reluctant attention of the only male back of the barrier, motioned him to her. "What is it, Ma'am? If it's an application, go to the far end, present your ID and fill out the questionnaire, then wait. You'll be called."

"I want to see the Director. Dr. Olsen."

"Dr. Olsen never sees anyone without an appointment. Give me your name and state your business and possibly his secretary will see you."

She leaned closer, spoke softly. "I *must* see him. Tell him that my husband has found out."

The office manager looked startled. "Your name?"

"Don't be silly. Just tell him that."

"Uh... wait here." He disappeared through a rear door.

She waited. After a remarkably short time he appeared at a side door of the waiting room, motioned her to him, then conducted her down a passage toward a door marked "Director—Keep out" and to a door near it marked "Secretary to the Director, Ring & Wait." There he left her with a woman who reminded Joan of Johann's third-grade teacher, both in appearance and authoritarian manner. The woman said frostily, "What is this nonsense? You may start by showing me your ID." (Three fingers stiff into her solar plexus, Boss, and say she fainted!) (Maybe. We'll try my way first.)

Joan answered in still more formal tones, "Not likely, Miss Perkins. Why do you think I'm veiled? Will you announce me? Or do I call the police and the news snoops?"

Miss Perkins looked startled, left her stenodesk and entered the private office behind it. She came out shortly and said angrily, "You may go in."

Olsen did not get up as Joan entered. He said, "Madam, you have chosen an unusual way of getting my attention. Now what is it? Come to the point."

"Doctor, don't you offer chairs to ladies?"

"Certainly. If they are ladies. A point you have gone to some trouble to render dubious. Speak up, my good woman, or I shall have you removed." (Boss, did you see him glance at the mike? That old bat in the next room is taking down every word.) (So I assumed, Eunice. So we won't talk yet.) Joan stepped close to the Doctor's desk, unhooked her yashmak, let it fall to her left shoulder.

THE DOCTOR'S expression changed from annoyance to startled recognition. Joan Eunice

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leaned across his desk, flipped off the dictation microphone. Then she said quietly, "Anything else still recording? Is this room soundproof? How about that door?"

"Miss—"

"'Miss' is enough. Are you ready to ask me to sit down? Or shall I leave—and return with my lawyer?"

"Do please sit down—Miss."

"Thank you." Joan waited until he got up and moved a chair to a correct "honored-guest" position near his own. She sat down. "Now answer the rest. Are we truly private? If we are not—and you tell me that we are—I will eventually know it...and will take such steps as I deem appropriate."

"Uh, we're private. But just a moment." He got up, went to his secretary's door, bolted it manually. "Now, Miss, please tell me what this is about."

"I shall. First, I've been supplementing my original endowment with quarterly checks. Have you been receiving these during my incapacitation?"

"Eh...one check failed to arrive. I waited six weeks, then wrote to Mr. Salomon and explained what your custom had been. It seems he checked the facts, for soon after we received two quarterly payments at once, with a letter saying that he would continue to authorize payments in accordance with your custom. Is there some difficulty?"

"No, Doctor. The Foundation will continue to receive my support. Let me add that the trustees are—on the whole—satisfied with your management."

"That's pleasing to hear. Is that why you came today? To tell me that?"

"No, Doctor. Now we get to the purpose. Are you *quite certain* that our privacy cannot be breached? Let me add that the answer is *far* more important to *you* than it is to me."

"Miss, uh—Miss, I am certain."

"Good. I want you to go into the cold vault, obtain donation 551-20-0052—I will go with you and check the number—and then I want you to impregnate me with it. At once."

The Doctor's face broke in astonishment. Then he regained his professional aplomb and said, "Miss—that is impossible."

"Why? The purpose of our institution, as defined in its charter—which *I* wrote—is to supply qualified females with donor sperm—on request, without fee and without publicity. That's exactly what I want. If you wish to give me a physical examination, I'm ready. If you want to know whether or not this body is licensed for child-bearing, I assure you that it is—although you know that in *this* case a fine for unlicensed pregnancy means less than nothing. What's the trouble? Does it take too long to prepare the sperm to do it all in one day?"

"Oh, no, we can have it warmed and viable in thirty minutes."

"Then impregnate me thirty minutes from now."

"But, Miss—do you realize the trouble I could get into?"

"What trouble?"

"Well...I do follow the news.

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Or I would not have recognized you. I understand that there is a question of identity—"

"Oh, that." Joan dismissed it. "Doctor, do you bet on the races?"

"Eh? I've been known to. Why?"

"If we are truly private you can't possibly get into trouble. But there comes a time in every man's life when he must bet. You are at such a crisis. You can bet on a certain horse—on the nose, you can't hedge your bet. And win. Or lose. As you know, the other trustees of this corporation are my dummies; *I* am the Foundation. Let me predict what will come to pass. Presently this identity nonsense will be over and the real Johann Sebastian Bach Smith will stand up. At that time the endowment of this institution will be doubled. At that same time the salary of the director will be doubled. If you bet on the right horse, you will be the director. If not—you'll be out of a job."

"You're threatening me!"

"No. Prophesying. Old Johann Sebastian Bach Smith was a seventh son of a seventh son, born under a caul; he had the gift of prophecy. No matter which way you bet, the endowment will be doubled. But only you and I will ever know what is done today."

"Mmmm... there are procedures to satisfy. I do have authority to permit any adult female to receive a sperm donation if I am satisfied that she qualifies—and let's say that I am. Nevertheless there are routines to go through, records that must be kept."

(He's ready to geek, Boss. So sing him a 'Money Hum,' with a different tune.) (Eunice, a cash bribe is to push him over if he won't fall. Let's see if he'll sell it to himself.)

Joan shook her head. "No records. Just do it to me and I'll hook my veil over my face and leave."

"But, Miss—I don't do these things *myself*. A staff doctor carries out the donation procedure, assisted by a nurse. They would think it strange if no records were kept. Very."

"No nurses. No assistants. You alone, Doctor. You are an M.D. and a specialist in genetics and eugenics. Either you can do this... or you don't know enough to head this institution—which the trustees would regretfully notice. Besides that, I go with you and check the number on that donation... and stick at your elbow until you place it inside me. Do we understand each other?"

The Doctor sighed. "I once thought a general practice was hard work! We can't be sure that a placed donation will result in impregnation."

"If not, I'll be back in twenty-eight and a half days. Doctor, quit stalling. Or bet on the other horse and I'll leave. No harsh words, now or later. Just that prophecy." She stood up. (Well, Eunice? Will the frog hop?) (Can't guess, dear. He's seen so many female tails he's bored with them. I can't figure him.)

Olsen suddenly stood up. "You'll need a cold suit."

"All right."

"Plus the advantage that a cold suit covers so thoroughly that a man would not recognize his own

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wife in one. I have a spare here, for V.I.P.'s."

"I think you could class me as a V.I.P.," Joan said dryly.

FORTY minutes later Dr. Olsen said, "Hold still a moment longer. I am placing a Dutch cap, a latex occlusive cervical pessary, over the donation."

"Why, Doctor? I thought those things were for contraception."

"Usually. And it will serve that purpose, too—mean to say, some of our clients wish to be protected at once from any possibility of impregnation from any other source. But in your case my purpose in installing this temporary barrier is to make certain that the donation *does* impregnate you. To give those wigglers a chance to reach target and to keep them from swimming downstream instead—follow me? Leave it in place until some time tomorrow—or later, it doesn't matter. Do you know how to remove it?"

"If I can't get it out, I'll call you."

"If you wish. If you fail to skip your next menses, we can try again in four weeks." Dr. Olsen lowered the knee supports, offered his hand. She stepped down and her skirt fell into place. She felt flushed and happy. (Eunice, it's done!) (Yes, Boss! Beloved Boss.)

Dr. Olsen picked up her cloak, held it ready to lay around her shoulders. She said, "Doctor—don't worry about that horse race."

He barely smiled. "I have not been worrying about it. May I say why?"

"Please."

"Um. If you recall, I have met Johann Smith—*Mister* Johann Smith—on other occasions."

"Eleven occasions, I believe, sir, including a private interview when Dr. Andrews nominated you to succeed him."

"Yes, Miss Smith. I'll never forget that interview. Miss, there may be some legal point to clear up concerning your identity. But not in *my* mind! I do not think that any young woman of your present physiological age could simulate Mr. Johann Smith's top-sergeant manner—and make it stick."

"Oh, dear!"

"Pardon me?"

"Dr. Olsen, this sex change I've undergone is not easy to handle. It is fortunate—for both of us—that you were able to spot Johann Smith behind the face I now wear. But—darn it, sir!—I've got to acquire manners to match what I am *now*. Will you call on me—oh, say three weeks from now when I hope to have cheerful news—and let me show you that I *can* simulate a lady when I try? Come for tea. We can discuss how the Foundation's work can be expanded under a doubled endowment."

"Miss Smith, I will be honored to call on you whenever you wish. For any reason. Or none." (Wups! Hey, Eunice, I thought you said he was bored with female tails?) (So I did. But we have an unusually pretty one, Joan, even from that angle. Gonna kiss him?) (Eunice, can't you treat just one man impersonally?) (I don't know; I've never tried. Aw, don't be chinchy; he's been a perfect lamb.) (Now

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you be a lamb, too—let's get out of here.)

Joan let the doctor lay her cloak around her shoulders; it brought his head close to hers. She turned her face toward that side, wet her lips and smiled at him.

She could see him decide to risk it. She did not dodge as his lips met hers—but did not put her arms around him and let herself be slightly clumsy, stiffened a little before giving in to it. (Twin! Don't let him put us back on that table—make him use the couch in his office.) (Neither one, Eunice. Pipe down!)

Joan broke from it, trembling. "Thank you, Doctor. And you see I *can* be a girl if I try. How do I get back to the waiting room without passing your Miss Perkins?" She hooked her yashmak.

XVIII

A few minutes later Shorty handed her into her car, locked her in, and mounted into the forward compartment. "Gimbel's Compound, Miss Smith?"

"Please, Finchley."

Once inside the compound Joan had Fred escort her to Madame Pompadour's. The fact that she had a private bodyguard got her immediate attention from the manager, who was no Madame Pompadour even though he wore his hair in the style made famous by the notorious Marquise and had manners and gestures to match. (Eunice, are you sure we are in the right place?) (Certainly, Boss—wait till you see their prices.) "How may I serve Madame?"

"Do you have a private room?"

"But of course, Madame. Uh, there is a waiting room where—"

"My guard stays with me."

The manager looked hurt. "As Madame wishes. If you will walk this way—" (Eunice, shall we walk *that* way?) (Don't try, twin—just follow him. Or her, as the case may be.)

Shortly Joan was seated facing a low model's walk; Fred stood at parade rest behind her. The room was warm; she unfrogged her cloak and pushed back its hood but left the yashmak over her features. Then she dug into her purse, got out a memorandum. "Do you have a model who comes close to these measurements?"

The manager studied the list—height, weight, shoulders, bust, waist, leg. "This is Madame?"

"Yes. But here is another specs list even if you can't match me. A friend for whom I wish to buy something pretty and exotic. She's a redhead with pale skin to match and green eyes." Joan had copied Winifred's measurements from the exercise records the two had been keeping.

"I see no problems, Madame, but in your own case permit me to suggest that our great creative artist, Charlot, will be happy to check these measurements or even to design directly on—"

"Never mind. I am buying items already made up. If I buy."

"Madame's pleasure. May I ask one question? Will Madame be wearing her own hair?"

"If I wear a wig it will be the same color as my hair, so assume

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that." (Eunice, should I buy a wig?) (Be patient and let it grow out, dear. Wigs are hard to keep clean. And they never *smell* clean.) (Then we'll never wear one.) (Smart Boss. Soap and water is the world's greatest aphrodisiac.) (I've always thought so. Though a girl should smell like a girl.) (You do, dearie, you do—you can't help it.)

"Madame's hair is a beautiful shade. And now, since Madame indicated that her time is short, perhaps it would suit her convenience to let our accounting department record her credit card while I alert the two models?"

(Watch it, Boss!) (I wasn't a hint the door, dearie.) "I use credit cards with several names. Such as McKinley, Franklin, and Grant. Or Cleveland." Joan reached into her purse, fanned a sheaf of bills. "The poor man's credit card."

The manager repressed a shudder. "Oh, goodness, we don't expect our clients to pay *cash*."

"I'm old-fashioned."

The manager looked pained. "Oh, but it's unnecessary. If Madame prefers not to use her general credit account—her priviliége!—she can set up a private account with Pompadour in only moments. If she will permit me to have her ID—"

"Just a moment. Can you read fine print?" Joan pointed at a notice near a portrait of President McKinley. " 'This note is legal tender for all debts, public and private.' I shan't get tangled up in a computer. I pay cash."

"But, Madame—we aren't set up for cash! I'm not certain we could make change."

"Well, I don't want to put you to any inconvenience. Fred."

"Yes, Miss?"

"Take me to La Boutique."

The manager looked horrified. "Please, Madame! I'm sure something can be arranged. One moment while I speak to our accountant." He hurried away without waiting for an answer.

(Why the fuss, Boss honey? I've bought endless things for you, against your personal-expenditures account. Jake said we could use it.) (Eunice, I've despised those moronic machines since the first time I was trapped by a book club. But I'm not just being balky. Today is *not* a day to admit who we are. Later—after we're out of court—we'll set up a "Susan Jones" account for shopping in person. If we ever do again. I can see it's a bloody nuisance.) (Oh, no, it's fun! You'll see, twin. But remember—I hold a veto until you learn something about clothes.) (Sho', sho', little nag.) (Who are you calling a nag, you knocked-up bag?) (Happy about it, beloved?) (Wonderfully happy, Boss. Are *you*?) (Wonderfully. Even if it wasn't romantic.) (Oh, but it was! We're going to have *your* baby!) (Quit sniffling.) (I'm not sniffling; you *are*.) (Maybe we both are. Now shut up, here he comes.)

The manager beamed. "Madame! Our accountant says that it is perfectly all right to accept cash!"

"The Supreme Court will be pleased to hear it."

"What? Oh! Madame is jesting. Of course there is a service sur-

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charge of ten percent for—"

"Fred. La Boutique."

"Please, Madame! I pointed out to him how unfair that is . . . and found the most wonderful solution!"

"Really?"

"Truly, Madame. Anything you choose to buy, I'll simply charge against my personal account—and you can pay me cash. No trouble, I'll be happy to. My bank doesn't make the least fuss over accepting cash deposits. Really." (Watch it, Boss; he'll expect a fat tip.) (If he can show us something we want he may get it. Cost is no huhu, Eunice; we can't get rid of the stuff.) (It's the principle of the thing, Boss.) (Forget it and help me spend money.) (All right. But we don't buy unless we like it.)

FOR the next two hours Joan spent money—and was dazed to discover how expensive women's clothes could be. But she suppressed her early upbringing and paid attention only to an inner voice: (Not that one, twin—it's smart but a man wouldn't like it.) (How about this one, Eunice?) (Maybe. Have her walk it around again, then have her sit down. Show some leg.)

(Here comes 'Winnie' again. Is that girl a real redhead, Eunice?) (Probably a wig but doesn't matter; she's almost exactly Winnie's size. That would be cute on our Winsome. Twin, see what they have in fancy gee-strings—green, for a redhead. Winnie ought to have at least one outfit intended to be seen by no one but her new boy friend.) (Okay, we'll give 'Bob' a treat. Who do you think he is, beloved?) (Haven't the faintest—and we don't want to guess. Do we? I just hope he's nicer to her than Paul was.)

"Mr. duValle? Do you have something exotic in a minimum gee for a redhead? Green, I suppose. And matching cups would be interesting, too. Something nice—and intimate for a bride." (Bride?) (Well, it might help Winnie become a bride, Eunice—and it steers him away from thinking I'm buying it for my sweetheart.) (Who cares what *he* thinks?)

"Jeweled perhaps? Emeralds?"

"I wouldn't want a bride to be mugged over a wedding present. Nor do I wish to buy her something more expensive than her bridegroom can afford. Bad taste, I think."

"Ah, but these are synthetic emeralds. Just as lovely but quite reasonable. Yola dear—come with me."

Several thousand dollars later Joan quit. She was getting hungry and knew, from long experience, that being hungry made her unwilling to spend money. Her subconscious equated "hungry" with "poor" in a canalization it had acquired in the 1930's.

She sent Fred to fetch Shorty to help carry while her purchases were being packaged and while she paid the startling sum. (Eunice, where shall we eat?) (There are restaurants inside this compound, Boss.) (Uh, darn it—no, *damn it*! —I can't eat through a yashmak. You know what will happen. Somebody who watched video yesterday will recognize us. Then the news snoops will be on us before

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you can say medium rare.) (Well . . . how about a picnic?) (Wonderful! Eunice, you win another Brownie point. But—where can we go? A picnic with grass and trees and ants in the potato salad—but private so I can take off this veil . . . and yet close enough that we won't starve on the way?)

(I don't know, Boss, but I'll bet Finchley does.)

Finchley did know. Shorty was appointed to buy the lunch at The Hungry Man inside the compound—"Get enough for six, Shorty, and don't look at the prices. Be lavish. But there must be potato salad. And a couple of bottles of wine."

"One is enough, Miss. I don't drink, wine is a mocker, and Finchley never drinks when he is on call to drive."

"Oh, think big, Shorty; I may drink a whole bottle myself—you can save my soul tomorrow. Today is special—my first day of freedom!" (Very special, beloved.) (Very, *very* special, Boss!)

Down into the crosstown chute, up onto Express Route South, out to the unlimited zone, then fifty miles at three hundred feet per second—a speed that Finchley did not use until Joan was protected by full harness plus collision net. The fifty miles melted away in fifteen minutes and Finchley eased it down and over, ready to exit. They were not shot at, even where Route South skirts the Crater.

"Finchley? Can I get out of this pesky cocoon now?"

"Yes, Miss. But I'd feel easier if you would wear the Swedish belt. Some of these drivers are cowboys."

"All right. But tell me the instant I can take it off." (Eunice, the engineer if-that's-the-word who designed if-that's-the-word these goddam straps did *not* have women in mind!) (You've got it rigged for a *man*, Boss—of course you're pinching a tit. Move the bottom half closer in and shift the upper anchor point after we stop; that's the way they rigged it for me. Some man has used it since the last time I did.) (Jake, probably, sometime when his own car was laid up. Sweetheart, how many things do I have to learn about being a woman before I can avoid tripping over my feet?) (Thousands. But you're doing all right, Boss—and I'm always here to catch you.) (Beloved. Say, this doesn't look like a picnic country. I wonder if Finchley is lost.)

They were passing through solid masses of "bedroom" areas—walled enclaves, apartment houses, a few private homes. The trees looked tired and grass was scarce, while the car's air-conditioning system still fought smog.

But not for long— Finchley turned into a secondary freight route and shortly they had farms on each side. Joan noticed that one belonged to her—to a subsidiary of Smith Enterprises, she corrected, and reminded herself that she no longer held control.

NEVERTHELESS she noted that the guard at a corner watch tower seemed alert and the steel fence was stout and tall and capped with barbed wire and an alarm strand, all in good maintenance. But they were past with-

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out her seeing what was being cropped—no matter; Johann had never tried to manage that slice of the conglom, he had known his limitations. (Eunice, what are we raising back there?) (Joan, I can't see if you don't look—and you never looked.) (Sorry, dearest. Speak up if you don't like the service.) (I will. I think it was a rotation crop. This soil has been farmed so hard and long that it has to be handled carefully.)

(What happens when the soil no longer responds to management?) (We starve, of course. What do you expect? But before that they'll build on it.)

(Eunice, it's *got* to stop, somewhere. When I was a boy I was a city kid but I could *walk* in less than an hour to green fields and uncut woods . . . woods so private I could play Tarzan in my skin. I wasn't 'just lucky'—even in New York City a boy with five cents could ride to farms and woods in less time than it took me to walk it.)

(Doesn't seem possible, Boss.) (I know. It's taken a fast car and a professional driver to do what I used to do on bare feet—yet this isn't real farm country; these are open-air food factories with foremen and time clocks and shop stewards and payroll deductions and house-organ magazines and you name it. A dug well and a tin dipper would cause a strike—and they'd be justified; those open wells and tin dippers spread disease. Just the same, the tin-dipper era was a *good* time in this country . . . and this one isn't. *Where do we go from here?*)

The inner voice failed to answer. Joan waited. (Eunice?)

(Boss, *I* don't know!)

(Sorry, just sounding off. Eunice, all my life I did the best I knew how with what I had. I didn't waste—shucks, even that white-elephant house keeps a lot of people off Welfare. But every year things got worse. I used to get sour consolation from knowing that I wasn't going to be around when things fell to pieces. Now it looks like I will be. That's why I say: '*Where* do we go from here?' I don't know the answer, either.)

(Boss?)

(Yes, dearest?)

(I could see it, too. Moving from an Iowa farm to a big city made me see it. And I did have plans, sort of. I knew you were going to die, I couldn't help but know, and I figured that Joe would get tired of me some day—no kids and no prospect of any, and me some day no longer with a fine job that took care of everything Joe needed. I underrated Joe; nevertheless I never forgot that he could hand me a pink slip anytime. So I had plans and saved my money. The Moon.)

(The Moon! Hey, that's a fine idea! Take one of Pan Am's package tours—de-luxe with private courier and all the trimmings. Do it before we bulge so big we can't climb through a hatch. What do you say, little imp?)

(If you want to.)

(You don't sound enthusiastic.) (I'm not against it, Boss. But I wasn't saving money for a tourist trip. I meant to put my name on the list and take the selection

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exams . . . and be able to pay the difference, since I didn't have one of the subsidized skills. Outmigrate. Permanently.)

(I'll be durned! You had this in mind—and never said a word?) (Why talk about if and when? I didn't plan to do it as long as you or Joe needed me. But I did have reason to be serious. I told you I was licensed for three kids.)

(Yes, surely. I've known it since your first security check.) (Well, three is a high quota, Boss—more than half a child over replacement. A woman can be proud of a three-baby license. But I wanted more.)

(So? You can, now. Fines are no problem, even though they've upped them again and made them progressive. Eunice, if you want babies, this one is just a starter.)

(Dear Boss. Let's see how we do with this one first. I knew I could not afford fines . . . but Luna has no restrictions against babies. They *want* babies. I think we're there.)

Finchley turned in at a gate—Agroproducts, Inc., Joan noticed—a competitor. He parked so as not to block the gate, then got out and went to the guard post. He had parked at such an angle that Joan could not see what was going on, the armor between her and the control compartment cut off her view.

Finchley returned, the car rolled through the gate. "Miss Smith, I was told to hold it under twenty miles per hour, so no safety belts is okay now."

"Thank you, Finchley. How much was the bribe?"

"Oh, nothing to matter, Miss."

"So? I expect to see it on O'Neil's Friday Report. If it is not there, I will have to ask you again."

"It'll be there, Miss," the driver answered promptly. "But I don't know yet what the total will be. Have to stop at their Administration Building and get us cleared through a back gate. To where you picnic."

"TO WHERE *we* picnic." Joan stopped to think. It irked her to pay a bribe when her status as a major competitor (retired, conceded) entitled her by protocol to red-carpet treatment. But she had not sent word ahead, a minimum courtesy in visiting a competitor's plant to allow him time to sweep dirt under the rug or to divert the visitor away from things. Industrial espionage could not with propriety be conducted at top level. "Finchley, did you tell the gate guard whom you were driving?"

"Oh, no, Miss!" Finchley sounded shocked. "But he checked the license even though I tell him it's your car—best to tell; he has a list of all private armoreds in the state, just like I have. What I tell him was, I'm driving guests of Mr. Salomon . . . and let him think it was a couple of Vips from the Coast with a yen to picnic in a safe spot. Didn't tell him anything really, except Mr. Salomon's name. That okay?"

"Just fine, Finchley." (Eunice, I feel like an interloper, being inside without giving my name. Rude.) (Look at it this way, Boss. *You* know who you are. But the public doesn't—not after that

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silly carnival yesterday. I think it's best to be Jake's guest . . . which is true, in a way.) (I still feel that I should tell Finchley to give my name to the Chief Agronomist. But would the word get out? Or, rather, how *soon*?) (Thirty minutes. Long enough for some clerk to phone in and a news copter to fly out. Then some snoop will try to interview you by loudspeaker because the boys won't let him land.)

(Some picnic!)

(If he does land, Shorty and Fred will be elbowing each other for a crack at him. Eager. Too eager. Boss, maybe you haven't noticed, but while they call you Miss Smith they treat you exactly as they treated me. In their heads they know you are *you* . . . but in their guts they feel you are *me*.) (That's not far wrong, Eunice. In my head I am *me* . . . but in my guts—your pretty belly—I am *you*.)

(Boss, I like that. We're the only one-headed Siamese twins in history. But not everything in our belly is me. There's one wiggler swimming faster than the rest—and he is 'Johann', not Joan, not Eunice—and if he makes it to the finish line, he's more important than both of us put together.)

(My love, you're a sentimentalist.) (I'm a slob, Boss. And so are you.) (Nolo contendere. When I think about Johann and Eunice—both dead, really—getting together in Joan to make a baby, I come unstuck and want to cry.) (Better not, Joan; the car is stopping. Boss? How long does it take a wiggler to get there? I know a spermatozoon has to move several inches to reach the ovum—but how fast does he swim? (Durned if I know, dear. Let's leave that cork in place at least a couple of days. Give the little bastard every possible chance. (Good!) (Do you know how to take it out? Or do we have to see Dr. O'Neil? We don't want to let Winnie in on this.) (Boss, I've seated them and taken them out so many times I can do it in my sleep. No fret, Annette. I've worn out more rubber baby bumpers than most girls have shoes.)

(Bragging. Boasting.) (Only a trifle, Boss dearest. I told you I had always been an ever-ready. For years and years, any day I missed was not my idea. I knew my purpose in life clear back when I was a Girl Scout, no breasts and still a virgin.)

Finchley returned to the car, spoke after he had buttoned in. "Miss?"

"Yes, Finchley."

"Farm boss sends greetings and says guests of Counselor Salomon are honored guests of Agroproducts. No bribe. But he asked if the main gate guard had put the squeeze; I told him No. Correct?"

"Of course, Finchley. We don't rat on other people's employees."

"Don't think he believed me but he didn't push it. He invited you both—assumed there was two and I didn't correct it—to stop for a drink or coffee on the way out. I let him think you might or might not."

"Thank you, Finchley."

THEY continued through the farm, came to another high gate; Fred got out and pressed a button,

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spoke to the security office. The gate rolled back, closed after them. Shortly the car stopped; Finchley unlocked the passenger compartment, offered his hand to Joan Eunice.

She looked around. "Oh, this is lovely! I didn't know there were such places left."

The spot was beautiful in a simple fashion. A little stream, clear and apparently unpolluted, meandered between low banks. On and near its banks were several sorts of trees and bushes, but they were not dense and there was a carpet of grass filling the open spaces. From its lawnlike texture it had apparently been grazed. The sky was blue with scattered fair-weather cumulus and the sunshine was golden warm without being too hot. (Eunice, isn't it grand?) (Uh-huh. 'Minds me of Iowa before the summer turns hot.)

Joan Eunice stripped off her sandals, tossed them into the car on top of her cloak. She wiggled her toes. "Oh, delicious! I haven't felt grass under my bare feet for more than twenty years. Finchley, Shorty, Fred—all of you! If you've got the sense God promised a doorknob, you'll take off your shoes and socks and give your feet a treat."

Shotguns looked impassive; Finchley looked thoughtful. Then he grinned. "Miss Smith, you don't have to tell me twice!" He reached down and unclicked his boots. Joan Eunice smiled, turned away and wandered down toward the stream, judging that Shorty would be less shy if she did not stare.

(Eunice, is Iowa this beautiful? Still?) (Parts of it, hon. But it's filling up fast. Take where we lived, between Des Moines and Grinnell. Nothing but farms when I was a baby. But by the time I left home we had more commuter neighbors than farm neighbors. They were beginning to build enclaves, too.) (Dreadful. Eunice, this country is breeding itself to death.) (For a freshly knocked-up broad you have an odd attitude toward reproduction, twin. See that grassy spot where the stream turns?) (Yes. Why?) (It takes me back . . . it looks like a stream bank in Iowa where I surrendered my alleged innocence.) (Well! Nice place for it. Did you struggle?) (Twin, are you pulling my leg? I cooperated.) (Hurt?) (Not enough to slow me down. No reason for it to. Boss darling, I know how it was in your day. But there is no longer an issue over tissue. Girls with smart mothers have it removed surgically when they reach menarche. And some just lose it gradually and never know where it went. But the girl who yells bloody murder and bleeds like a stuck pig is a rare bird today.) (Infant, I must again set you straight. Things haven't changed much. Except that people are more open about it now. Do you suppose that water is warm enough to swim in?)

(Warm enough, Boss. But how do we know it's clean? No telling what's upstream.)

(Eunice, you're a sissy. If you don't bet, you can't win.)

(That was true yesterday . . . but today we're an expectant mother. A babbling brook can be loaded

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with nineteen sorts of horribles.)

(Uh . . . oh, hell! If it's polluted, it'd be posted.) (Back here where you can't reach it without being passed through two electric gates? Ask Finchley; he may know.)

(And if he says it's polluted?) (Then we go swimming anyhow. Boss, as you pointed out, if you don't bet, you can't win.) (Mmm . . . if he *knows* it's polluted, I'm chicken. As *you* pointed out, beloved, we now have responsibilities. Let's go eat, I'm hungry.) (*You're* hungry? I was beginning to think you had given up the habit.) (So let's eat while we can. How soon does morning sickness start?) (Who dat, Boss? The other time the only effect it had was to make me hungry morning, noon, and night. Let's eat!)

Joan Eunice trotted back toward the car, stopped dead when she saw that Shorty was laying the car's folding table—with one place setting. "What's that?"

"Your lunch, Miss."

"A picnic? On a table? Do you want to starve the ants? It should be on the ground."

Shorty looked unhappy. "If you say, Miss." (Joan! You're not wearing panties. If you loll on the ground, you'll shock Shorty—and interest the others.) (Spoilsport. Oh, all right.)

"Since it's set up, Shorty, leave it that way. But set three more places."

"Oh, we eat in the car, Miss—we often do."

She stamped her foot. "Shorty, if you make me eat alone, I'll make you walk home. Whose idea was this? Finchley's? *Finchley*! Come here!"

A FEW moments later all four sat down at the table. It was crowded as Joan had insisted that everything be placed on it at once—"Just reach," she explained. "Or starve. Is there a strong man here who can open that wine bottle?"

The dexterity with which Shorty opened it caused her to suspect that he had not always been a teetotaler. She filled her glass and Fred's, then reached for Finchley's. He said, "Please, Miss Smith—I'm driving," and put his hand over it.

"Give it to me," she answered, "for four drops. For a toast. And four drops for you, Shorty, for the same purpose." She put about a quarter of an inch in each of their glasses. "But first—Shorty, will you say grace?"

The big man looked startled, at once regained his composure. "Miss Smith, I'd be pleased." He bowed his head. (Boss! What's eating you?) (Pipe down! Om Mani Padme Hum.) (Oh! Om Mani Padme Hum.) (Om Mani Padme Hum.) (Om Mani Padme . . .)

"Amen."

"Amen!"

(Om Mani Padme Hum. Amen.)

"Amen. Thank you, Shorty. Now for a toast—which is a sort of a prayer, too. We'll all drink it, so it must be to someone who isn't here . . . but should be." (Boss! You must *stop* this—it's morbid.) (Mind your own business!) "Will one of you propose it?"

Finchley and Shorty looked at each other—looked away. Joan caught Fred's eye. "Fred?"

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"Uh— Miss, I don't know how!" He seemed upset.

"You stand up—"Joan stood, the others followed—"and say whatever you like about someone who isn't here but would be welcome. Anyone we all like. You name the person to be honored." She raised her glass, realized her tears were starting. (Eunice! Are *you* crying? Or am *I*? I never used to cry!) (Then don't get me started, Boss—I told you I was a sentimental slob.)

Fred said uncertainly, "A toast to . . . someone we all like . . . and who should be here. *And still is*!" He suddenly looked frightened.

"Amen," Shorty said in sonorous baritone. "'And still *is*.' Because Heaven is as close as you'll let it be. That's what I tell my people, Fred . . . and in your heart you know I'm right." He poured down, solemnly and carefully, the symbolic teaspoonful of wine in his glass; they all drank.

Joan said quietly, "Thank you, Fred. She heard you. She heard you too, Shorty. She hears me now." (Boss! You've got them upset—and yourself, too. Tell them to sit down. And *eat*. Tell 'em *I* said to! You've ruined a perfectly good picnic.) (No, I haven't.) "Finchley. You knew her well. Probably better than I did . . . for I was a cranky old man and she catered to my illness. What would *she* want us to do now?"

"What would . . . Mrs. Branca? . . . want us to do?"

"Yes. Did you call her Mrs. Brance? Or Eunice?" (They called me Eunice, Boss—and after the first week I kissed them hello and goodbye and thanked them for taking care of me. Even if Jake could see. He just pretended not to notice.) (Busybody. You're a sweet girl, beloved. Anything more than kiss them?) (Heavens, Boss! Even getting them to accept a kiss in place of the tips they wouldn't take took doing.) (I'll bet!—on *you*, that is—sister tart.) (Knocked-up broad.)

"Uh, I called her Mrs. Branca at first. Then she called me Tom and I called her Eunice."

"All right, Tom, what does Eunice want us to do? Stand here crying? I see tears in your eyes; I'm not the only one crying. Would Eunice have us spoil a picnic?"

"Uh— She'd say, 'Sit down and eat.' "

"That she would!" Shorty agreed. "Eunice would say, 'Don't let hot things get cold and cold things get hot—*eat*!' "

"Yes," agreed Joan Eunice, sitting down, "as Eunice was never a spoilsport in all her short and beautiful life and wouldn't let anyone else be. Especially me, when I was cranky. Reach me a drumstick, Fred—no, don't pass it."

Joan took a bite of chicken. (Twin, what Shorty said sounded like a quotation.) (It was, Boss.) (Then you've eaten with him before.) (With all of them. When a team drove me late at night, I always invited them in for a bite. Joe never minded, he liked them all. Shorty he was especially glad to see; he wanted Shorty to model for him. At first Shorty thought Joe was making fun of him—didn't know that Joe rarely joked

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and never about painting. They never got to it, though, as Shorty is shy—wasn't sure it was all right to pose naked and scared that I might show up while he was posing. Not that I would have.) (Not even once, little imp? Shorty is a beautiful tower of ebony.) (Boss, I keep telling you—) (—that nudity doesn't mean anything to your generation. Depends on the skin, doesn't it? *I* would enjoy seeing our black giant—and that goes for Johann as well as for Joan.) (Well—) (Take your time thinking up a fib; I've got to make conversation.) "Tom, do you have those mustard pickles staked out or may I have some? Shorty, you sounded as if you had sampled Eunice's cooking. Could she cook?"

Finchley answered, "You bet she could!"

"Real cooking? Anybody can flash a prepack—and that's what kids nowadays seem to think is cooking." (Boss, I'll spit in your soup!) "But what could she have done faced with flour and lard and baking powder and such?"

"Eunice would have done just fine," Shorty said quietly. "True, she mostly never had time for real cooking—but when she did—or whatever she done, anyways—she done just perfect."

(My fan! Boss—give him a raise.) (No.) (Stingy.) (No, Eunice. Shorty killed the vermin who killed you. I want to do something for him. But it can't be money, he would not accept it.)

"She was an artist," agreed Fred.

"You mean 'artist' in the general sense. Her husband was, I recall, an artist in the usual sense. A painter. Is he a good one? I've never seen any of his work. Do any of you know?"

Finchley said, "I guess that's a matter of opinion, Miss Smith. I liked Joe Branca's paintings—but I don't know anything about art; I just know what I like. But—" He grinned. "Can I tell on you, Shorty?"

"Aw, Tom!"

"YOU were flattered, you know you were. Miss Smith, Joe Branca wanted to paint that big ape on your right."

(*Bingo*!) (Trouble, Eunice?) "And did he, Shorty?"

"Well, no. But he *did* ask me. He did." (Don't you *see*, Boss? This is that clincher. A fact you first learned from *me* and nowhere else . . . and then had confirmed to the hilt. Now you know I'm *me*.) (Oh, piffle, darling.) (But, Boss—) (I've known you were you all along, beloved. But this isn't proof. Once I knew that Joe and Shorty had met, it was a logical necessity that Joe would want him to model —*any* artist would want to paint him.)

(Boss, you make sick! It's proof. I'm *me*.) (Beloved darling without whom life would not be worth living even in this beautiful body, I *know* you are you. But flatworms don't matter, coincidences don't matter, no mundane proof matters. There is no proof that some cocksure psychiatrist could not explain away as coincidence, or déjà vu, or self-delusion. If we let *them* set the rules, we're lost. But we shan't. What

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does matter is that you have me, and I have you. Now shut up; I want to get them all so easy with me that they'll call me Eunice. You say they used to kiss you?)

(Oh, sure. Friendly kisses. Well, Dabrowski used to put zing in it but you know how Poles are.) (I'm afriad I don't.) (Put it this way, Boss. With a Pole, don't advertise unless you mean to deliver —because *his* intentions are as honest as a loaded gun. With Dabrowski I was very careful not to let it go critical.)

(I'll remember. Just as well he isn't here. Because the situation is like that with Jake, only milder. Little baggage, you caused all my mobile guards to fall in love with you. So now I've got to get them to accept that you are dead while feeling that you are still alive, equally. If they call me 'Eunice' I'm halfway there. If they kiss me—) (*What*? Boss! Don't try it!)

(Now see here, Eunice! If you hadn't played 'My Last Duchess' to half the county, I wouldn't be having to repair the damage.) ('Damage,' huh? You're *complaining*?)

(No, no, my darling! Never. I was the prime beneficiary of your benevolence. But to lose something of value is a damage, and that is the damage I must repair.) (Well . . . I won't argue, dearest. But in this case you can let it be; I never let it warm up that much.) (And *I* say you don't know what you are talking about. Cool you may have meant to keep it. Unsexy—or as unsexy as you could manage which isn't very. But all four of my mobiles were willing to die for you—correct?) (Uh—) (Let's have no silly talk. Do you think the fact that I paid them had anything to do with their willingness? Careful how you answer.)

(Uh . . . I don't *have* to answer! Boss, what's the use of stirring them up over my death?) (Because, my darling, from now on they will be guarding *me*—as I now am, inside your lovely body—just as they guarded you. They've got to *want* to guard me, or they'll never be happy in this weird situation. It's either that, or fire them or retire them—) (Oh, no!) (Of course not. To paraphrase Sherlock Holmes; when you have eliminated what you can't do, what remains is what you *must* do. Besides, dearest and only, this is stern practice for the much harder case we still face.) (Jake? But Jake is—) (Little stupid! Jake has already accepted the impossible. I mean *Joe*.)

(But Boss! You must *never* see Joe.)

(God knows I wish I could avoid it. Never mind, beloved; we won't see him until you know—as I do—that we must. Now either shut up, or coach me in how to handle these brave men.)

(Well . . . I'll help all I can. But you'll never get them as easy as they were with me—'kissing friends' easy, I mean. *I* was an employee. *You* are the Boss.)

(If that argument were valid, queens would never get pregnant. Sure it makes it harder. But you've given me a lot to work with. Want to bet?)

(Oh, sure, I'll bet you a billion dollars you can't kiss even one of

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them. Don't be silly, Boss; we can never make a real bet, there is no way to pay off.) (You don't have much practice being an angel, do you, little imp? You still think in earthy terms. Certainly we can make a bet and pay off to the winner. This baby in us—) (Huh! Now wait a moment—) (*You* wait a moment, Eunice. If I win this bet, *I* name our baby. If I lose, *you* have the privilege. Fair bet?)

(Oh. All right, it's a bet. But you'll lose.)

(We'll see.)

(Oh, yes, you will, Boss. You'll lose even if you win. Want to know why?) (Planning on cheating?) (Not necessary, Boss darling; you're going to find that you *want* to name the baby whatever name *I* want it to have. Because you're a sucker for a pretty girl, Boss, always have been and still are.) (Now wait a moment. I used to be, but now I *am* that 'pretty girl' and—) (You'll find out. Do you want coaching? I'll help you win if it can be done. It can't.) (Yes, but tuck your advice in edgeways; I've been chewing this bone too long.) "Fred, I'll trade you one of these Danish sandwiches for more wine. Then keep our glasses filled; Shorty doesn't drink and Tom won't and I want company in getting tiddly, this is my freedom celebration."

(Fred might be easiest if you can get him over seeing ghosts when he looks at you.) "I don't mind another glass, Miss, but I mustn't get tiddly, I'm on duty."

"Pish and tush. Tom and Shorty will get us home even if they have to drag us. Right, Shorty?" (Shorty is your impossible case. I managed it only by being 'little girl' to him—which you can't be, Boss.)

"We'll certainly try, Miss Smith."

"DO I have to be Miss Smith on a picnic? You called Mrs. Branca Eunice, did you not? Did she call you Shorty?"

"Miss, she called me by my name. Hugo."

"Do you prefer that to your nickname?"

"It's the name my mother gave me, Miss."

"That answers me, Hugo; I will remember. But it brings to mind a problem. Anybody want to fight me for the last black olive? Come on, put up your dukes. But that's not the problem. I said I didn't want to be called Miss Smith under these circumstances. But I don't want to be called Johann either; that's a man's name. Hugo, you have christened babies?"

"Many times, Miss—uh—"

Joan cut in fast. "That's right, you don't know what to call me. Hugo, having named so many babies you must have opinions about names. Do you think 'Joan' pronounced as two syllables would be a good name for a girl who used to be a man named Johann?"

"Yes. I do."

"Tom? What do you think?" (Tom would kiss you at the drop of a hint if you weren't his employer. I don't think he ever did give up hoping to catch me alone . . . so I was as careful not to let that chance come up as I was with Dabrowski. All it took with Tom

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was to say, 'Tom, if you're going to be stuffy about letting me pay for extra service—' it was an after midnight run, Boss; a rare-blood call—'at least you can kiss me goodnight.' So he did, quite well. After which Hugo was too polite not to lean way down and give me a fatherly little peck. But what worked for Eunice can't work for Miss Smith.) (So watch me switch decks on them, young 'un.)

"It sounds like a good name to me," the driver-guard agreed.

"Fred? Do I look like 'Joan' to you?" She sat up straight and lifted her chest. (You look like you're going to break that bandeau, if you aren't careful.) (Pfui, little hussy; it can't break. I want him to realize that I'm female.) (He realizes it. Winnie ought to be here to take his pulse.)

"I don't see why anybody should get a vote but you. But, sure, I like it."

"Good! I still have to sign papers with my former name—but I'm 'Joan' in my mind. But, friends, this country must have a thousand Joan Smiths in it; I need a middle name. But I *want* one for a much better reason." She looked with solemn seriousness at the giant black. "Hugo, you are a man of God. Would it be presumptuous of me to call myself . . . Joan Eunice?" (Boss, if you make my friend Hugo cry I'll—I'll—I won't speak to you the rest of the day!) (Oh, quit nagging! Hugo won't cry. He's the only one of the three who believes you're here. He has faith.)

"I think that would be beautiful," Reverend Hugo White answered solemnly and sniffed back tears.

"Hugo, Eunice would not want you to be sad about it." She looked away from him, her own eyes bright with unshed tears. "That settles it. My new name will be—*is*—Joan Eunice. I don't want anyone ever to forget Eunice. Most especially I want you, her friends, to know this. Now that I am a woman, Eunice is my model, the ideal I must live up to, every hour, every minute, of my new life. Will you help me? Will you treat me as Eunice? Yes, yes, I'm your employer; somehow I must be both, and it's not easy. But the most difficult part for me is to learn to behave and think and feel as *Eunice* . . . when I've had so many weary years as a cranky, self-centered old man. You are her friends—will you help me?" (Boss, did you ever sell real estate in Florida?) (Damn it, if you can't help, keep *quiet*!) (Sorry, Boss. That was applause. As Hugo would say, 'You done perfect.')

Tom Finchley said quietly, "We'll help. That goes for Dabrowski, too. By the way, she called him Anton. First she called him Ski like the rest of us. Then she learned his first name and called him by it."

"Then I will call him Anton. Will you all call me Eunice? Or at least Joan Eunice? To help me? Oh, call me Miss Smith when others are around; I know you won't feel easy otherwise. You probably called her Mrs. Branca if other people were—"

"We did."

"So call me Miss Smith when it

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would be natural for you to call her Mrs. Branca. But when you called her Eunice, call me Joan Eunice and—dear and trusted friends!—any time you feel that I have earned it, please call me Eunice. It will be the highest compliment you can pay me, so don't use it lightly. Leave off the 'Joan' and call me 'Eunice.' Will you?"

Finchley looked at her, unsmiling. "Yes . . . Eunice."

"Tom, I haven't earned it yet."

Finchley did not answer. Fred said, "Let me get this straight. 'Joan Eunice' is for everyday . . . but 'Eunice' means we think you've done and said just what Mrs. Branca would have."

"That's right, that's what I said."

"THEN I know what Tom meant. Uh, this has been a touchy day—worse for you, I'd say, but not easy for any of us. Shorty—Hugo, I mean—said she was an angel. Or meant it, anyhow. I can't argue; Shorty is a preacher and knows more about angels and suchlike than I do. But if she was—is, I mean—still, she had a lot of salt and pepper in her, too. You remember an hour back when you snapped at Shorty and yelled for Tom?"

She sighed. "Yes, I remember. I lost my temper. I've got a long way to go. I know it."

"But that's just what I'm *saying* . . . Eunice. She had a lot of spunk. If we had tried to make her eat by herself, she would have kicked the gong. Right, Shorty?—I mean Hugo?"

"Amen! Eunice."

Finchley said, "Fred read my mind close enough . . . Eunice. But I was thinking of other things, too. I never thought of her as an angel, partic'larly. She just treated us like people."

"Tom—"

"Yeah, Shorty? Hugo."

"My name's Shorty to you—and to you, Fred. Don't put on any fancies. Hugo was Mama's name for me. And hers. Yours, Eunice. But I near forgot what I had to say. Tom, that's all anybody wants. To be treated 'like people.' She done it that way—Eunice. And now you do, too. 'Like people.' Mr. Smith didn't quite manage it. But he was old and sick and we made allowances."

"Oh, dear! I feel like crying again. Hugo—when I was Mr. Smith, I never meant to be anything but people. Truly I didn't."

"Sick people can't help being cranky. My Daddy got so mean before he passed on, I run away from home. Worst mistake I ever made. But I don't fault him for it. We do what we do, then we live with it. Eunice—the first Eunice—is an angel now, my heart tells me and my head knows. But she had her little human ways, same as everybody. The dear Lord don't fault us for that."

"Hugo? If it had been me and not her, would I have made it? To Heaven?" (Om Mani Padme Hum! Watch it, Boss! He'll drag you over to that creek and wash your sins away.) (If he wants to, I'll let him. Shut up!)

"I don't rightly know," the preacher said softly. "I never knew Mr. Smith that well. But the Lord

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do move in mysterious ways. Looks like He give you a second chance. He always knows what He's doing." (Oh, all right, twin. Try not to get water up our nose.)

"Thank you, Hugo. I think He did, too—and I'm trying to justify it." She sighed. "But it's not easy. I try to do what Eunice would do. At least justify the second chance *she* gave me. I think I know what she would do now. But I'm not certain." (I'd knock off all this talk, that's what *I'd* do.) (Pipe down and give me a chance.) She looked around. "I don't know how well you knew her and I keep learning things about her. I think you three—you four; I include Anton—must have been her closest friends, at least in my household. Certainly you knew her better than I had thought. Tom?"

"Yes, Eunice?"

"Did you ever kiss her?"

Her driver looked startled. "Yes . . . Joan Eunice."

"Meaning Eunice would never ask such a question; she would just do what her heart told her to. I wanted to, Tom—but I was scared. Not yet used to being a girl." She jumped up, stood by his chair, took his hands, pulled.

Slowly he got to his feet. She put her arms around his shoulders, put up her face—waited.

He sighed and almost scowled, then took her in his arms and kissed her. (Twin, he can do lots better.) (He will. The poor dear is scared.) Joan let him go without forcing it beyond his willingness, whispered, "Thank you, Tom," and quickly left his arms.

—went on to Fred, took his hands. Again Fred looked frightened but he got up promptly. (What about Fred, Eunice? Sexy or sisterly?) (Too late, twin!) Fred embraced her with unexpected force, met her mouth so quickly than Joan was caught with her lips open and he at once answered it, savagely.

But briefly. He broke from it and both were trembling. (Eunice! What is this? You didn't warn me.) (So I goofed. Later, dear. Slow march now and say three Money Hums and be darn sure to be an innocent child with Father Hugo.)

Joan went slowly around the table the long way, stopped by Hugo, waited. He got up from his chair, looked down at her. She moved closer, put her hands on his chest, looked up, face solemn. lips closed, eyes open.

Gently he put his arms around her. (My God, Eunice, if he really hugged us, he 'ud break us in two!) (He never will, twin; he's the gentlest man alive.)

Hugo's lips met hers in soft benediction, unhurried but quickly over. She stayed in his arms a moment. "Hugo? When you pray for her tonight, will you add a prayer for me? I may not deserve it. But I need it."

"I will, Eunice." He seated her with gallant grace, then sat down again. (High, low, jack, and game, twin—what are you going to name him?) ('Eunice,' of course!) (Even if he's a boy?) (If he's a boy, he'll be named Jacob E.—for 'Eunice' —Smith.) ('Johann E. Smith' is better.) (I won the bet, so shut up. I won't wish 'Johann' on a boy. Now what's this about Fred?) (You

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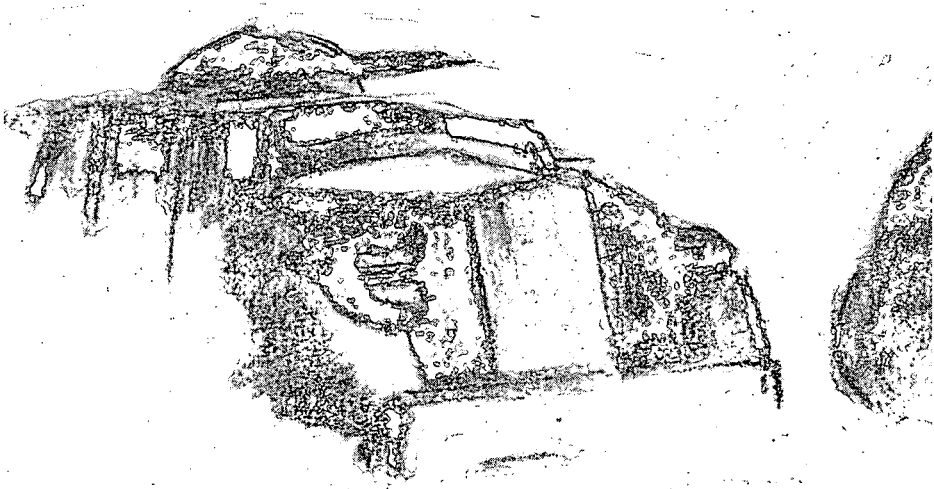

won't believe it.) (By now I believe anything. All right, later.) "Fred, is there any wine in that bottle? Hugo, will you open the second bottle? I need it, I'm shaky."

"Certainly, Eunice. Hand me the bottle, Fred."

"I'm going to eat some more, too, and I hope all of you will. Tom, am I still Eunice? Or am I a hussy who doesn't understand how a lady behaves?"

"Yes, Eunice. I mean No, Eunice. I— Oh, hell!"

SHE patted his hand. "That's the nicest compliment I've had yet, Tom. You would never have said 'Oh, hell' to Miss Smith . . . but you know that Eunice—Joan Eunice—is human." She looked around the table. "Do you know how *good* it is to be touched? Have you ever watched kittens snuggling? For over a quarter of a century no one kissed me. Except for an occasional handshake I don't think anyone ever touched me. Until nurses and doctors started handling me. Friends—dear friends—you have taken me back into the human race, with your lips. I am so very grateful to Eunice—to Eunice Branca—that she kissed you before I did, and won your friendship—your love? I think so. For it

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meant that you let me in—treated me as 'people!' Uh, tell me this, I must know—even if it makes you, Tom, call me Joan Eunice again. Did Eunice kiss Anton, too?" (Boss, I'm not going to tell you *anything* until we're alone!) (Didn't ask *you*, dear.)

"Won't anyone tell me? Well, I suppose it's an unfair question."

Finchley said suddenly, "Teams shift around. I drive with Fred, and Shorty with Ski, and so forth. Been times when I rode Shotgun for Ski. Eunice, she treated us all alike. But don't never think anything bad about it—"

"I don't!"

"—because there wasn't any such. She was so warm and friendly—and *good*—that she could kiss a man friend just for, uh—"

"For lovingkindness," Shorty supplied.

"'For lovingkindness.' Kissed us thank you and good night as quick with her husband there as any other time. Always did, if we stopped for a late bite o' supper with them." (All right, twin. Fred and Anton. Not Tom and Hugo. Happened only once. Oh, Tom would have, but no chance, so I kept it cool. Hugo—nobody gets past Hugo's guard and I never tried. He has moral character—

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something you and I don't know anything about.)

"Thank you for telling me, Tom. I'll never let Anton guess. But he'll find me easy to kiss if he wishes to . . . now that I know that she shared lovingkindness with him. Abrupt change of subject: Tom, is that pretty stream polluted?"

"It's clean. Clean as a creek can be, I mean. I know because I found out about this place through the company lending it to our guild for a picnic. Some of us went swimming after the farm super told us it was okay."

"Oh, wonderful! Because I want to swim. I last went swimming in natural water—old swimming hole style, I mean—let me see . . . goodness! More than three-quarters of a century ago."

"Eunice, I don't think you should."

"Why?"

"Because it can be polluted another way. Dropouts. Not all the dropouts are in the A.A.s; any wild countryside attracts them. Like this. I didn't make a fuss but when you walked down to the bank by yourself, Fred had you flanked one side and me the other."

"Well, heavens, if you can keep me safe on the bank, you can keep me safe in the water."

"It ain't quite the same, truly it ain't. I was a few seconds late once, I won't be again. Some dropouts are real nasty weirdos, not just harmless nuts."

"Tom, why argue? I want to get into that water, feel it all over me. I intend to."

"I wish you wouldn't . . . Joan Eunice."

She jerked her head around at the last two words. Then she grinned and pouted her lower lip. "Okay, Tom. Darn it, I've handed you three a leash you can lead me by any time you see fit. And yet I'm supposed to be boss. Funny."

"It's like the Secret Service," Finchley answered soberly. "The President is the top boss of any . . . but he gives in when his guards tell him not to do something."

"Oh, I wasn't complaining; I was wryly amused. But don't jerk that leash too much, Tom; I don't think Eunice would stand for it and neither will I."

"I'm hoping you won't pull on the leash as much as she did. If she, uh—well, things could 'a' been different."

Fred said, "Tom, don't cry over spilt milk."

Joan said quickly, "I'm sorry. Boys, I think the picnic is over. Maybe some day we can all have that swim somewhere safe and just as beautiful." (Eunice, can you swim?) (Red Cross lifesaver—you knew that, it was in my snoopsheet. Never went out for the team, though; cheerleader was more fun.) (I could make a comment.) (Look who's talking! No-pants Smith.) (Who taught me?) (You didn't need teaching; you have the instincts.)

XIX

A SHORT time later they were again in the car. Finchley said, "Home, Miss Smith?"

"Tom, I can't hear you."

"I asked did you want to go home, Miss?"

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"I understood that part but this intercom must be out of order. I heard something that sounded like 'Miss Smith.' "

There was a silence. "Eunice, do you want to go home?"

"Not until dinnertime, Tom; I want all of this lovely day I can have."

"Okay, Eunice. Do I cruise? Or go somewhere?"

"Uh . . . I have one more item on my list, and there's time enough for anything you three may want to pick up, too, so check around."

"Will do. Where do we take you for what you want, Eunice?"

"I don't know. I lost touch with such matters years ago. Tom, I want to buy a present for Mr. Salomon, something nice but unnecessary—presents should be unnecessary, a luxury a person might not buy himself. So it probably would be a men's shop that stocks luxurious unnecessaries. Abercrombie & Fitch used to be that sort—but I'm not certain they are still in business."

"They are. But let me ask Fred and Shorty."

Shortly Finchley reported: "There are a dozen places that would do. But we think The Twenty-First Century Stud has the fastest stock."

"Roz. Let's giddyap and get there."

"That is, if you don't mind their prices. 'Twigs and leaves.' "

"I don't mind; I've met thieves before. Tom—all of you. I came out of this operation with more money than I had last year . . . and it's a nuisance. I've played the money game and I'm bored with it. Any time any of you can think of a good way to help me get rid of some—a *good* way, I said; I won't be played for a sucker—you'd be doing me a favor to tell me. Hugo, are there any poor people in your church?"

His answer was slow. "Lots of them, Eunice. But not *hurtin'* poor, just Welfare poor. I'd like to think about it . . . because it don't do a man no good to plain *give* him what he ought to root for. So the Book says, in different words."

"That's the trouble, Hugo. I've given away money many times and usually did harm when I meant to do good. But the Book also says something about the eye of the needle. All right, think about it. Now let's go see those thieves. I'll need a man to help me. Which one of you dresses the most far-out when you aren't in uniform?"

She heard Fred laugh. "Eunice, it's no race. You should *see* the getups Tom wears. A Christmas tree. A light show."

Finchley growled, then said, "Don't listen to him, Eunice."

"He's probably jealous, Tom. All right, if there is parking inside or near this shop, you come help me."

As they passed through the second gate Finchley said, "Crash belts, Eunice?"

"I'm wearing the Swedish—and it's comfortable now that Hugo has adjusted it. Could we get along with just it and the collision net if we didn't go so fast? Or does that make me 'Joan Eunice' again?"

"Uh— Will you wear the forehead strap?"

"All right. It's just that I don't

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like to be tied down all over. It reminds me—well, it reminds me of the way the doctors kept me strapped down after the operation. Necessary, but I hated it." She did not mention that a forehead strap was what she disliked the most.

"We heard about that—must 'a' been horrid. But you need the forehead strap. Say I'm doing only a hundred, a slam stop could break your neck. If you don't wear it."

"So I wear it."

"I don't see the light on the board."

"Because I haven't put it on yet. There. Did the light go on?"

"Yes. Thank you . . . Eunice."

"THANK *you*, Tom. For taking care of me. Let's mush. I wasn't pulling on the leash, truly I wasn't." (Says you. Boss, you're mendacious, untruthful and a fibber.) (Where did I learn it, dearie? They're sweet boys, Eunice—but we've got to work out a way to live so that we don't have to clear everything with forty other people. Good servants are priceless—but you work for them as much as they work for you. Life should be simpler. Honey, how would you like to go to India and be a guru and sit on a mountain top and never have any plans? Just sit and wait for your grateful chelas to gather around?)

(Might be a long wait. Why not sit at the bottom of the mountain and wait for the boys to gather around?) (One-track mind!) (Yes. Yours, you dirty old man.) (Conceded. But I try to act like a lady.) (Not too hard, you don't.) (As hard as you ever did, little trollop. I was called Joan Eunice *once* . . . and the issue had nothing to do with sex.) (You'd be surprised how much sex had to do with it, Joan.) (Well . . . from that point of view, yes. But as long as they call me Eunice I'll go on believing that I've 'done just perfect.' Honestly, though, good servants can be smothering. Take Winnie. She's a darling—but she's underfoot every minute. Eunice, how the devil can we manage that actively female life you want—sorry, *we* want—with so much chaperonage?)

(Take a tip from Winnie.)

(Let her in on your plans. Then she'll keep your secrets and never ask a question, just as you do for her. Try it.)

(I may have to: I'm sure she won't talk . . . and will happily listen to anything I need to spill. But, Eunice, if I go outside the house, it's going to be hard to keep Tom and Hugo, or Anton and Fred, from guessing. You saw the elaborate maneuver I had to use today.)

(You didn't have to, Boss; they won't talk.)

(Perhaps they won't, but I don't want them even to *think*. They're beginning to think I'm an angel—named Eunice—and I'd rather keep it that way.)

(Boss, they know darned well that Eunice is no angel. Even Hugo knows it . . . because Hugo is the smartest of the four, even if he is an illit. Knows people. Understands them from having been there himself. Forgives them their transgressions and loves them anyhow. Boss dear, they loved me the

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way I was, feet of clay and all—and they'll love you the same way.)

(Maybe. I hope so. I know I love you more, knowing more about you and things I never suspected, than I did before we consolidated. Immoral little wench. What's this about you and Fred and Anton? Did you really?)

(Wondered when you'd get around to that. Those good-night kisses did start out just friendly. Brotherly. Fatherly in Hugo's case. Never got past that with Tom, as we were always either under Hugo's eye, or Jake's, or both—I just knew darn well a *man* was kissing me. But Fred and Anton weren't much chaperonage for each other and they were both charged up over me. So, when a chance turned up, I thought, 'Why not?')

(Pure charity, eh?)

(Was that sarcasm, Boss? Anyhow, they took me home late one night. Not a blood donation call, just working late with Jake when we were very rushed getting things arranged for you. The 'warm body' project. I invited them in for a coke and a snack, as usual. Only it turned out Joe wasn't home.)

(So human nature won—again.)

(You seem to have a low opinion of human nature, Boss darling.)

(I have a *high* opinion of human nature. I think it will prevail in spite of all efforts of wowsers to suppress it. But that's all it took? *Two* men? Cold sober? And a chance that your husband might walk in? Lovely fallen angel, your story not only has holes; it is inconsistent. I do know something about men, having been one. What they'll risk, what they won't. Plenty, that is, for a woman. But two men tend to be wary of each other and still more so when a husband might show up. Darling, you've left out something—this does not sound like a first time.)

(Boss, cross our heart, it *was* a first time . . . and the only time, for I was killed soon after. All right, I'll fill in the holes. Joe wasn't likely to walk in and they knew it. *Couldn't*, as our door was hand-bolted from the inside whenever either of us was there. Joe was even more careful about it than I was, as he had always been a city boy. But they knew also that Joe was not due home until midnight . . . and they brought me home about twenty-one-thirty. No hurry, no worry, no flurry. While Joe can't read, he can tell time—you know those little dummy clocks some one-man shops use? Back at such-and-such a time, and mark the time by setting the hands?

(We had one of those, to tell the other one when he would be back. That night the door opened to my voice, so I looked for the dummy clock and found it set for midnight—and told Anton and Fred that I was sorry but Joe wasn't going to be home soon enough for a visit.)

(Called attention to it, minx. Sounds like a setup.)

(Well, I knew what I was ready for, once I knew we had the place to ourselves. Oh, shucks, Boss, I'm still trying to be your 'nice girl.' I had had my ear cocked for a late arrival with that team for over a month. When Jake asked me to work after dinner, I phoned

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Joe, just as usual. And set it up under Jake's nose. Short-talked it —almost another language if spoken by a husband and wife. What Jake heard was me telling Joe that I wouldn't be home until twenty-one-thirty. What Jake didn't hear, or would not understand, was that I was asking Joe if he minded being elsewhere, in family short-talk code we used if we wanted that favor. It was all right, Boss, darling; I made myself scarce for Joe's sake oftener than I asked it of him. The only question was: Was he painting? Turned out he was not, so I was home free.

(Joe asked if I wanted him to be away all night? What he said was: 'Roz. Punch or phone?' Not that Joe *ever* punched me to wake me, but I answered, 'Judy,' meaning that it was up to him but I hoped he would punch me, and added, 'Blackbirds,' and gave him a phone kiss and signed off. All set, no sweat—knew what I would find at home.)

('Blackbirds?')

('Four and twenty blackbirds, baked in a pie—' set midnight on the clock even if you stay out all night, Joe, darling. Oh, it could have been 'pumpkin' or 'Christmas Eve' or 'Reach' or 'solid gold.' But what I used was 'Blackbirds.')

(Did you kids ever talk English?)

(Of course we did, Boss. Joe speaks good English when he needs to. But short-talk settled it in a dozen words. Without giving Jake any hint that I was late-dating him. If I had had Betsy at hand I would have used hush and spoken standard English. But we weren't at your house, Boss; we were at Jake's pad in Safe Harbor. You see, we weren't actually working late, not that late. I was using the phone you used yesterday, with Jake only feet away from me. Had to be short-talk.)

(Let me get this straight. Joe set the dummy clock, saying he would not be home until midnight. Did he come home then?)

(About ten minutes after midnight. Joe wouldn't embarrass a guest by being too prompt. Joe is a natural gentleman, never had to learn; he just *is*. It was the first thing that attracted me to him, and the quality that caused me to ask him to marry me. An illit, certainly—but I'll take an illit gentleman over an Ivy-League squeak any year.)

(I agree, beloved. The more I hear about Mr. José Branca the better I like him. And respect him. And regret his tragic loss—meaning *you*, beloved little strumpet. I was just trying to get the schedule straight for what must have been a busy night. Okay, Joe got home shortly after midnight. But early that evening you phoned him and set things up for this date with Anton and Fred. Then you got back into bed with Jake—)

(Oh, dear! Boss, I've shocked you again.)

(No, my darling. Surprised, not shocked. I find your memoirs fascinating.)

(Shocked. That schedule sounds like a whore on pay day. But it wasn't that at all, Boss. It was love —love and respect for Jake, love and affection for Anton and Fred,

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love and devotion and understanding and mutual trust and respect with Joe. If my husband didn't disapprove, what right have you—or anybody!—to look down your nose at me?)

(Darling, darling! I was *not* shocked, I have *never* been shocked by you. Damn it, it's that generation gap. You can't believe that I packed far more offbeat behavior into my long years of lechery than you possibly could have crowded into the fourteen years you claim. You've been a busy body, that's clear—but I had more than five times as many years at it and quite as much enthusiasm. Probably not as frequent opportunities, but beautiful girls get asked oftener than do homely boys. But it was never for lack of trying on my part, nor do I have any complaints, as I received more cooperation than I had any reason to expect.)

(I think you were shocked.)

(No, little innocent. Sheer admiration—plus surprise at your endurance. You must have been half dead the next day.)

(On the contrary I felt grand. Glowing. Happy. You remarked on it. You may even recall it . . . it was the day Joe painted me with tiger stripes and a cat's face makeup.)

(Be darned if I don't! You were bouncy as a kitten—and I said you looked like the cat who ate the canary. Darling girl, I was hurting that day; you cheered me up.)

(I'm glad.)

(How much sleep did you get?)

(Oh, plenty. Six hours. Five at least. Plus a nap stretched out on my tummy while Joe did most of the stripes. Joan, a well-loved woman doesn't need as much sleep as a lonely one—you'll find out. As for it being too much for me—Boss, who told me just last week that nothing encourages sex the way sex does? *You*, that's who.)

(Yes. But I was speaking from a man's viewpoint—)

(Works the same for a woman, twin. You'll see.)

(I hope so. I know that most people—in my day—assumed the opposite. But it's not true. Sex, whatever else it is—much else!—is an athletic skill. The more you practice, the more you can, the more you want to, the more you enjoy it, the less it tires you. I'm glad to hear—very personally glad—that it works that way for a woman, too. But you aren't the first girl to tell me so. Uh . . . first time I heard a girl say that, or roughly that, was when Harding was President. Not a girl, a very sweet young married woman who had more in common with you than you are likely to believe. Almost certainly dead now, God rest her soul; she would be over a hundred years old.)

(What was her name?)

(Does it matter? Little busybody, you were telling me about Fred and Anton. I still don't understand how you swung it. The setup, yes—but how did you gentle them to it? Did you split the time and take them into your apartment separately?)

(Oh, heavens, no! That would be rude. And embarrassing for everyone. It would have turned me off utterly. It was a Troy.)

(Well?)

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(Boss, can you imagine how excited two men can get while kissing—fondling—the same girl? If she's willing? If they trust each other? Which they did, they were driver and shotgun together.)

(Yes, that's true but I can't visualize—wups! I just remembered something that happened so many years ago I had almost forgotten it.)

(Tell me.)

(No, no, you go on. Just that history repeats itself—as it always does. Go on.)

(Well, they do, Boss. Excite each other even if they don't touch each other at all. Just her. 'Heterodyning' is the term I learned for it in secretronics; I don't know what the kinseys call it. But I had been kissing them good night almost every other night for weeks, and kissing them when they picked me up in the mornings. And the kisses got warmer and it's never been my nature to discourage a man if I liked him—which I did; I felt affectionate toward both of them; they're nice people.

(Presently we were stopping for a necking session—could no longer call it a good night kiss—in the basement parking before they would take me up the lift. I had to slow that down by saying, 'Watch it, boys. You're not only getting body paint on your uniforms, you're getting me so mussed up I'll have trouble getting neat enough that Joe won't notice it.' Which did slow them down, more on my account than any fret about uniforms; they liked Joe—everybody likes Joe—and did not want to cause me worry at home. Didn't tell them that Joe wasn't fooled; his artist's eyes sees much more than most people see.

(But we settled it that night, Boss. I told them that I was not a tease and that I was as eager as they were . . . but that I was *not* going to be spread in a basement. But that I would find a chance. They are both nice boys—oh, men, sure; Anton is forty and Fred is as old as I am. Was. So they waited and didn't do more than kiss me and grab a friendly feel. Then twice we almost had it made but Joe was busy painting, which I would not interrupt to take the President to bed.

(Then we hit the jackpot. Almost missed at the last minute; Jake was going to send me home in his car. He told me to cancel the call I had put in for my car. Yours, I mean. I surprised Jake by being balky—told him that I didn't feel safe with Charlie unless he, Jake, was along. True, as far as it went; Charlie is a bad one, not like our four.

(So dear old Jake was going to get dressed and ride with me—I said that was silly, that Finchley and Shorty—I never referred to them as Tom and Hugo and wouldn't advise you to—)

(I'm not stupid, dearest. When I'm Miss Smith, they are Finchley and Shorty.)

(Sorry, Boss darling, I know you're not stupid. But I have more experience in being a woman than you have.)

(So you have, and you keep me straight, darling. But what's this about Tom and Hugo?)

(Misdirection. I knew who was

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on call that night. So Fred and Anton picked me up and I was tempted to tell them—getting more excited all the time, myself. Couldn't. Would have spoiled it some for them, since men enjoy much spreading a married woman without her husband knowing it—even sweet old Jake relished me more for that naughty reason. I always went along with this quirk because it gave me more control over a situation not easy to control once a man has had you. Gives you a lever. You might remember that, Joan.)

(I will. But I'll need a husband to make use of it.)

(You'll get us a husband, never fear, dear—I still think we ought to marry Jake. He'll come around. But don't hold out on him, Joan; Jake is not a man you can pressure that way.)

(Eunice, I won't hold out on Jake one-half second. I've never had any respect for that female tactic and won't use it now that *I* am female.)

(I have never used it, Boss. I've used almost every other female deception—but not that one. That one is whoring but not honest whoring. 'Minds me. How do you feel about whores, Boss?)

(Me? Why, the way I feel about any professional who performs a personal service. Say a dentist, or a lawyer, or a nurse. If he's honest I respect him. If he is competent as well, my respect is limited only by his degree of competence. Why?)

(Have you ever patronized whores? Hired their services, I mean?)

(If I give that a simple affirmative will you get on with your story? We're already downtown, damn it.)

(Yes, sir. I mean, 'Yes, twin sister you knocked-up virgin.' Got home, went up the lift with them, was 'surprised' to find Joe not at home, found the dummy clock propped on the sink, hands set at midnight and told them what it meant. That did it. Finis.)

(*Hey*!)

(What is there to tell? You already know what we did.)

Joan sighed. (That is the skimpiest account of a gang bang I ever heard in my long and evil life.)

(*What*? But it wasn't a gang bang, Boss! Quit dragging your feet and come on into this century. A Troy is *not* a gang bang. Nor is it a frimp session—or needn't be—and this was not. A Troy is friendly and loving. They are both married and they treated me as sweetly as they would treat their wives—and I loved the way they treated me and I loved both of them quite a lot—and still do—long before the evening was over . . . when up to then it had been just affectionate, sex-charged friendship. Boss, one of the regrets I have about being killed is that I was never able to offer them the second chance at me they had earned—and I had promised. Mmm . . . do you think you might make it up to them?)

(Huh? As you pointed out, I'm their boss; it wouldn't be easy. And besides . . . well, hell, I'm scared. *Two* men?)

(You didn't seem scared of Mac and Alec.)

(Not quite the same thing.)

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(Nothing ever is, Boss—especially about sex. But I want to tell you this. A Troy—if it works right, and it can't unless there is trust and respect all the way around—if it works, it is the nicest thing that can happen to a woman. Not just twice as nice because she gets twice as much of what she wants so badly. That's not it; she might even get less than some rutty young stud could manage alone. It's the warm and friendly and loving and trusting aspect that makes it so good. Four times better, at least. Maybe eight. Oh, arithmetic can't measure it. But, Joan darling—listen to me—until you have been in bed between two sweet and loving men, men who love each other almost as much or even more than they love you . . . with your head pillowed on both their arms and surrounded by their love—until that's happened to you, you still have one virginity to go, and an important one. Darling, I was crying most of the time they were with me . . . cried again when I kissed them good night . . . was still crying happy after they left . . . then jumped out of bed and rushed to unbolt the door when Joe got home a few minutes later—and blubbered all over him and took him straight to bed and told him all about it while he was being especially sweet to me.)

(Did he want to hear about it?)

(Wouldn't *you* want to?)

(Yes but no two men are alike and some husbands get headaches from horns.)

(Some do. Maybe most of them, Joan. I was always careful of Joe's feelings. Sometimes I strayed and carefully kept it from him—I never told him about Jake.)

(Why not? I would think that Joe would approve of Jake for you if he approved of anyone. Jake respects Joe very highly—you know it, too; you heard him.)

(Yes. But Jake is rich and Joe is dirt poor. Perhaps Joe could have accepted Jake—I now think he could have. But I wasn't sure, so I didn't risk hurting him. But Anton and Fred—well, they are just mobile guards; Joe treated them as friends and equals, and secretly—I think—felt a little superior to them, since he is an artist and they are just stiffs. I knew they wouldn't trouble Joe's mind . . . and I was right; he was delighted for me. Happy that I was happy. Can't explain it, Joan; you get an instinct for it. But a man's pride is a fragile thing and it is all the armor he has; they are far more vulnerable than we are. You have to be oh so careful in handling them. Or they droop.)

(I know, Eunice. Literally droop in some cases. Did I tell you that my second wife made me psychically impotent for almost a year?)

(Oh, you poor darling!)

(Got over it. Not through a shrink. Through the warm and generous help of a lady who didn't assume that it was my fault. And I never troubled again until I was too feeble for any sort of proper physical functioning.)

(I'm glad you found her; I wish I could thank her. Joan . . . I wasn't born knowing this about men; I found out the hard way. Twin, I made some bad mistakes in high school. Look—males are

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so much bigger and more muscular than we are, I didn't *dream* that they could be so fragile. Until I hurt one boy's pride so badly he dropped out of school . . . and I've tried never to hurt any boy, or man, since. I was stupid, Boss.)

(Eunice, how long has it been since I last told you I love you?)

(Oh, at least twenty minutes.)

(Too long. I love you.)

Finchley's voice interrupted her revery. "We're about to park, Miss Eunice."

"What's this 'Miss Eunice' nonsense? We're not in public."

"Seemed like a good compromise."

"It does, huh? Why just dabble your toes? Why not go whole hawg and call me Miss Smith?—and I won't kiss you good night."

"Very well—Miss."

"Oh, Tom, don't tease me. It's been a perfect day; don't remind me that I must be Miss Smith again. You know I'll kiss you good night if you'll let me . . . or the real Eunice wouldn't speak to me. Hugo, make him behave!"

"I'll fix his clock, Eunice. Tom, you call her Eunice, real nice."

"I'm sorry, Eunice."

"That makes me feel better, Tom. Are you going to be able to park this wagon close enough that you can come with me?"

"Sure thing, Eunice—but keep quiet right now, please; I've got to work close with the traffic computer to get us in."

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XX

"GOOD evening, Chief." Joan rested her hand on O'Neil's forearm, stepped lightly down.

"Good evening, Miss. Message from Mr. Salomon. His respects to you and regrets he will not be back for dinner. Twenty-one o'clock, he hopes."

"I'm sorry to hear it. Then I shan't dine downstairs; please tell Cunningham or Della that I want trays in my lounge for Winnie and me. No service."

"Two trays and no service, Miss—right."

"And tell Dabrowski that I want him to drive me tomorrow."

"He's gone home, Miss. But he knows he has the duty. He'll be ready."

"Perhaps you didn't understand what I said, Chief. I want to tell him, now, that *I* want him to drive me tomorrow. Ten, possibly—not earlier. So after you phone the pantry, call Dabrowski and give him that message from *me*. Leave the call in until you reach him. And phone me at once when Mr. Salomon's car returns, no matter what hour. Don't consult him; do it. Before Rockford unbuttons."

"Yes, Miss. Phone the pantry. Phone Dabrowski immediately thereafter. Phone you instantly when Mr. Salomon's car returns, before he is out of his car. If I may say so, Miss, it feels good to have your firm hand back at the controls."

"You may say so, to me. But not to Mr. Salomon. For *his* firm hand has been invaluable. As you and I know."

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"As we both know. He's a fine gentleman, Miss; I respect him. Shall I tell Cunningham to send down for your packages?"

"No, Finchley and his guns can handle them—though I did go on quite a shopping spree." Joan gave her security boss Eunice's best happy-little-girl grin. "I was drunk with excitement, bad as a kid on Christmas, and tried to buy out the town. Finchley. Split those packages three ways and you three come up with me. Yes, I know it's not your work, so don't report me to your guild."

Packages, three men, and one woman almost filled the front lift. Joan waited until Finchley had punched for her floor and the lift had started, then she quickly punched the "Stop" touchplate, held them between floors. "Put those packages down."

She went first to Shorty, took his face between her hands. "Thank you, Hugo. Thank you most of all, for your gentle wisdom got us all straightened out." She pulled his face down, kissed him softly and unhurriedly, lips closed. "Good night."

She turned to Fred. "Thank you, Fred. I thank you—and Eunice thanks you." As his arms closed she let her lips come open. (See what I mean, twin? That's a sample.) (I see—I shall be *very* careful not to get him alone unless I expect more than a sample.) "Good night, Fred."

"Tom, it's been the best day of my life. I hope you enjoyed it half as much as I did. Thank you." Joan went straight into the kiss without waiting for Finchley to answer, her face up, eyes closed—and with her back to Shorty in case her driver decided to take advantage of it.

—which he did. (Goodness! Eunice, are you *sure* you never laid him?) (Quite sure, darn it! Are *you* going to?) (I don't know, I don't know!)

Breathless she broke from him, turning her back to all of them to punch again for her floor and trying to regain her composure.

The car stopped and she said, "Put everything in my bedroom, boys. Winnie! Wait till you see!"

The little redhead had been waiting at the lift. "Miss Joan! You've been gone all day!"

"And why not? Put them anywhere, on the floor, on the bed. Winnie, have you had dinner? That's all, thanks. Good night and thank you all."

"Good night, Miss Smith."

As soon as the door sealed Joan hugged her maid, lifting her off her feet. "You didn't answer. Did you eat with the staff? Or did you wait?"

"Couldn't eat. Oh, Joan, I've been *so* worried. You ran away and didn't tell anybody where you were going. Bad girl—to worry me so."

"Pooh. I had guards with me; you knew I was safe."

"But guards aren't nurses. I'm supposed to watch you for Dr. Garcia."

"And pooh all over dear Doctor, too. Winsome, I'm no longer a patient, I'm no longer a ward; I'm a free woman and healthy as a horse and you can't mother me every minute like a broody hen.

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All right, we've got supper coming up and they'll leave it in the lounge and we'll eat when we feel like it."

"I know, I was backstairs when the order came in—so I hurried up the service lift and thought I had missed you as the indicator was stopped. Then it started again."

"SOMETHING wrong with that lift, it stalled. But we kept punching buttons until the Yehudi woke up. Too many gadgets in this house." (Eunice, I thought a stalled elevator was as safe as a grave. Is there no privacy *anywhere*?) ('Fraid not, Boss honey. But I never worried much about such things; I just worried about hurting people.) (I stand corrected. Ever been caught with your legs up, hussy?) (Only once when it was embarrassing—and that's all it was. It's nothing to worry about.)

"Shall I tell maintenance about the lift?"

"No, Finchley will report it. Winsome, maintenance is no part of your duties; you're here to giggle with me and to give me a shoulder to cry on and to cry on mine—and to keep dear Doctor from fussing." Joan started undressing. "Get your clothes off; we're going to model clothes—I've been shopping. Boy oh boy, did I shop! Gave the economy a shot in the arm, I did. Get those duds off—have you had your bath, you dirty girl? Or are you going to bathe with me? Come here and let me smell you."

"Had a bath when I got up."

"You smell all right, I fear me I'm well marinated; it's been a busy day. Okay, we'll dunk together and get stinking good later. Before giving dear Jake another lesson in how to relax. But now we model. Give us a kiss first." (Eunice, will that rubber dingus stay in place in the tub?) (It'll stay seated anywhere—or I would have left a dozen orphans behind me. You can even use the fountain—and you had better.)

"Joan, since you were going shopping, why didn't you take me along? Meanie."

"Complaints, complaints, complaints. I thought you needed sleep, dear. Or didn't Bob show up?"

Winifred blushed clear down her breasts but she answered happily, "Oh, yes, he did! But I would have been up at once if you had called me—love to shop."

"What time did you wake up?"

The blush renewed. "Not till almost thirteen. Long past noon."

"The defense rests. Winsome baby, I didn't take you along because I bought things for *you*, too . . . and if I had had you along, you would have fussed every time I spent a dollar on you. And to set a precedent, too. I'm not a prisoner any longer. I'm free to come and go just as you are. If I don't take you along, you mustn't ask why and I may not tell you where or what."

The younger girl looked crushed. "Yes, Miss Joan. I'll remember." So Joan Eunice again took her in her arms. "There, there, pet; don't quiver your lip. I'll take you with me, mostly. And if I don't, I'll tell you about it, mostly. But I might tell you a fib instead. I might have a date with

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some horny interns and would not want to shock my Winsome."

"You're teasing me."

"Not mean teasing. I'm at least half serious. Winnie, if you want to see your Bob no one in this house cares but me and my interest is friendly. But *me*? There are forty-odd people staring down my neck. If I ever have a man in my bed, the whole household will know it, and it's at least fifty-fifty that some member of my ever-loyal staff would sell the fact to a news snoop and it would be on the morning gossip program—phrased so that I can't sue without making it worse. Not?"

"Uh . . . sounds horrible. But I guess it could happen."

"You know it could. Every gossip column, every gossip program, proves it. Hon, if a person is too rich, or too prominent, all the public lets him wear is the Emperor's New Clothes—and what they like best is bad news, good news is too bland. Back when I was running it, Smith Enterprises spent many thousands of dollars every quarter to give me a totally false public image—poisonous phrase!—for business reasons. But that's done with and now I'm fair game. Still more interesting fair game now that I'm miraculously young and female and pretty. No, beautiful—let's be fair to Eunice Branca. You saw what they did yesterday; you watched the babble box. What would they do if they could prove something on me?"

"Uh, something nasty, I guess."

"I *know* they would, I'm not guessing; I've had too many years of trying to avoid the spotlight. The old Romans knew what they were doing when they tossed living victims to the lions; most people are fairly decent—but collectively they love blood. I'm going to do something about getting out of the spotlight but in the meantime I'm vulnerable. Winnie, what would you do if I woke you some night and asked you to let me slide a man into your bed—so that *you* would be caught, not me. Be certain to be caught, I mean, public as a show window. So caught that Bob would know, too."

The little girl took a deep breath. "I'd do it! Bob would understand."

"Ah, but if I begged you *not* to explain it to Bob? Just take the rap for me?"

"I'd still do it."

Joan kissed her. "I know you would. But you won't have to, sweet Winsome. If—no, *when*—I slip, I won't load it onto my chum. But I may ask you to tell lies for me some day—jigger for me—help me cover up. Would you?"

"Of course I would."

"And I knew it and didn't need to ask. It might be soon, I'm feeling more female every day. Now let's play Christmas—I think that round, flubsy box is for Winnie."

SHORTLY Winifred was parading in front of mirrors with an awed look on her face. "Oh, Joan, you shouldn't have!"

"That's why I made you stay home. It's a maid's uniform, dear—an allowable deduction for me by terms of the Cooks, Domestics, and Hotel Workers approved contract."

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"Maid's uniform indeed! It's a Stagnaro Original straight from Rome; I read the label."

"As may be, I'll tell my accountant to list it as a deduction just to annoy the IRS. Take it off, dear, and let's see what else we find. Hey, here's one for *me*." Joan quickly got dressed. "What do you think? Of course with this I ought to have my body painted."

"I wouldn't use paint if I were you. You look yummy and that off-white sets off your skin. It's a delicious design even though kind o' wicked. Joan, how do you know so much about buying women's clothes? I mean, uh—"

"You mean, 'How does an old man who hasn't picked out a dress for a woman in at least half a century manage it?' Genius, dear, sheer genius. You ought to hear my bird imitations." (Hey! Don't *I* get any credit?) (Not unless you want to break your cover, Mata Hari. The men in the white coats are just outside that door.) (Pee on you, twin. Maybe someday we can tell Winnie.) (I hope so, darling—I not only love you, I'm proud of you.) (*Kiss*!)

They worked down to two boxes which Joan had held back. When Winifred saw the synthetic emerald set—gee patch and two half-moon cups shaped for bare nipples—she gasped. "Oh, goodness! Put it on, Joan, and let me find your highest heels!"

"*You* find *your* highest heels, darling—those green rhinestone stilts you were wearing earlier. They didn't have stilts in your size to match this outfit. I've ordered them."

"This is for *me*? Oh, no!"

"Then put it down the trash chute; gee-strings can't be exchanged. Winsome, that dress was designed for a redhead—and the cups are too small for me. Put it on. That envelope contains a floor-length transparent skirt, silk with a hint of matching green. With the skirt it's just right for formal dinner parties. You could wear one emerald on your forehead. Not any other jewelry. Or paint."

"But, Joan, I never go to that sort of party—I've never ever been invited to one."

"Perhaps it's time I gave one; the banquet hall hasn't been used in ten years. You would look beautiful—junior hostess at the other end of the long table. But, dear, besides an ultra-formal party, it's intended—without the skirt—for most informal occasions. Would you enjoy wearing it for Bob—and would he enjoy taking it off?"

Winifred caught her breath. "I can't wait."

"Got a date tonight, hon?"

"No, that's why I said I can't wait. Because I can't resist it—want Bob to see me in it . . . want him to take it off me. Joan, I shouldn't accept it, it's much too expensive. But I will. Goodness, you make me feel like a kept woman."

"You are one, dear; I'm keeping you. And enjoying it very much."

The little nurse stopped smiling. Then she faced her mistress, looked up directly into her eyes. Joan, maybe I shouldn't say this, maybe it'll spoil everything. But I

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think I must. Uh—" She stopped and took a deep breath. "Two or three times it's seemed to me you almost made a pass at me."

(There's the pitch, twin! Too late for me to help.) "It's been more than three times, Winifred."

"Well . . . yes. But why did you stop?"

Joan sighed. "Because I was scared."

"Of *me*?"

"OF me. Winsome darling—I've done many hard things in my life. Such as waiting in a landing boat, bobbing around and seasick and stinking with fear . . . then dropping off into four feet of water with machine guns raking us and killing my buddies on both sides. But this is the hardest thing I've ever tried. Being a woman. I have to think about it every instant—do consciously the things you do automatically. Goodness, today I came within a split second of walking into a men's toilet instead of the ladies' powder room. And now *you*. Darling, can you guess what a temptation you are to me? Can you realize that old Johann is looking at your winsome loveliness out of Joan's eyes? Winnie, there hasn't been a moment but what I've wanted to touch you. Hold you in my lap. Kiss you. Make love to you. If I were a man . . . I'd be trying my damnedest to crowd Bob out. Or at least make room for me."

"Joan."

"Yes, dear?"

"There's room for you."

Joan found that she was trembling. "Darling! *Please*! Can't we wait? You have Bob . . . and I have still to learn to be a woman." She started to cry.

And found Winifred's arms around her. "Stop it, dear. Please stop. I didn't mean to upset you. I'll help, of course I'll help. We'll wait. Years if you need that long. Until you're calmed down and sure of yourself—and want me. But Winnie isn't trying to seduce her Joanie. Oh, it can be sweet, truly it can. But you're right and I do have Bob and my nerves aren't frayed the way yours must be. Some day you'll fall in love with a man, and may forget all about me. Wanting to touch me, I mean—and that's all right, as long as I can love you and be your friend."

Joan dashed away a tear, and sniffed. "Thank you, Winnie. I've made a fool of myself again."

"No, you haven't. I just have trouble remembering, sometimes. Do you want a tranquilizer?"

"No. I'm all right now."

"Would you rather I didn't touch you?"

"No. I want you to kiss me, Winnie. Hard. Best you ever have. Then put on the green gee-string dress and let us look at it. Then we'll eat. And then grab some soap suds and make me smell better for our prayer meeting with Jake—I need those prayers tonight; they're the right tranquilizer. Put it on, dear. But kiss me first."

Winnie kissed her—started to hold back, then flared like a prairie fire and did make it "best she ever had."

(Break, twin, before the house burns down. That's the fanciest

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tap dancing since Bojangles died.) (What do you know about Bojangles? You *can't* know about him.) (Ever hear of classic films, Boss? Now see to it that Bob marries her; you owe her that, for the hurdles you make her jump.) (How can I when I don't know who he is?) (You can find out. Cheat. O'Neil knows. After you know who he is, find out what he wants; he'll geek. *Men*! Boss, I love you but sometimes I'm not sure why.)

After Winnie modeled the emerald dress she fetched in their trays from Joan's upstairs lounge while Joan opened the last package. It contained her present for Jake. "Winnie, tell me what you think of this?"

It was a necklace rich and simple—a heavy gold chain with tripled linkage, supporting a large gold ankh, a crux ansata. Winifred took it in her hands. "It's lovely," she said slowly. "But it's not a woman's necklace, you know. Or did you?"

"It's a man's necklace. A present for Jake."

Winifred frowned slightly. "Joan, you do want me to help you learn how to behave as a woman."

"You know I do."

"Yes, I know. When I see that you are about to make a mistake, I must tell you."

"You don't think Jake will like this?"

"I don't know. He may not know what it means. And you may not know. This cross with a loop is called an 'ankh'—and it's what my granddaddy would have called a 'heathen symbol.' It means—well, it means most of the things our meditation prayer means, life and goodness and love and so forth. But specifically it means *sex*, it's an ancient Egyptian symbol for the generative forces, both male and female. It's no accident that the loop looks something like a vulva and that the rest of the design could be interpreted as a male symbol. The way it's used *now*—among people my age, people the age you have become—is . . . well, a wife could give it to her husband, or a husband could give a smaller one to his wife. Or they might not be married—but it *always* means sexual love—flatly and no nonsense about it. If that's not what you mean, Joan, if you just want to give him a nice necklace, take it back and exchange it for another that isn't so specific in its symbolism. Any necklace means love—but perhaps you want one that a daughter could give her father."

Joan shook her head. "No, Winnie. I've known what the ankh means since a course in comparative religion, oh, three-quarters of a century ago. I assume that Jake knows, too; he has solid classical training. I hadn't been sure you kids knew its ancient meaning—I see I was mistaken. Winnie, this present is no accident; I've asked Jake to marry me several times. He won't. Because of my age."

"Well . . . I can see why he might feel that way."

"It's ridiculous. Sure, I'm a quarter of century older than he is—but it no longer shows and I'm

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healthy enough for marriage. Even though dear Doctor thinks I may drop dead."

"But—Doctor Garcia doesn't really think you'll drop dead. And I didn't mean *you* were too old, I meant he—oh, dear!"

"Yes, yes, I know. He's being noble, damn him! But he doesn't have to *marry* me, Winnie. I'll accept any crumb I'm offered. This present is intended to say so."

Winifred looked solemn, suddenly kissed the ankh and handed it back. "You and me both, Joan—any crumb we're offered. Well, I wish you luck. With all my heart."

"Good Winnie. Let's sop up some calories; it's getting latish and Jake will be home—I hope—by twenty-one. I want to be clean as a kitten and just as pretty and smelling even prettier when the stubborn darling gets here. Help me?"

"Love to. And look, Joanie, we douse you in Harem Breeze both the cologne and the perfume—and the powder. And I won't wear any scent. I'll scrub off what I'm wearing."

"No, we'll renew the bait on you, too. Maybe we'll heterodyne."

" 'Heterodyne?' "

"Term that used to be used a lot in radio. In this case it means that if one girl isn't enough, two might do the trick. Last night Jake was polite about not staring . . . except that he was noticing my Winsome with both eyes all the time he was pretending not to. I'm not trying to crowd you into a Troy—but I have no scruples about staking you out as bait."

THEY were out of the tub and working on the finishing touches when the house phone sounded. "Miss Smith. Mr. Salomon's car just rolled in."

"Thank you, O'Neil."

A few minutes later Joan phoned the Green Suite. "Jake dear? This is your resident guru. If you wish to share a prayer meeting, guru and chela will call on you whenever you say."

"That's welcome news; I'm tired—and last night was the best sleep I've had in years, Guru."

"I'm glad. Have you had dinner?"

"At the Gib, hours ago. Ready for bed now. If you'll let me have, oh, twenty minutes, for a tub."

"Shall we be there in exactly twenty minutes? I don't want to run into Hubert."

"I sent him to bed. Nobody here but just us chickens."

"Twenty minutes, dear. Off."

Again two girls went barefooted down the hallway. Joan was wearing, under a negligee, the ankh necklace. The door opened for them and Jake came toward them. He was wearing a bathrobe and had a book in hand with a finger marking his place. "Hello, my dears. You both look charming. Joan, I took the liberty of stopping in your downstairs library and borrowing this book."

"It's not a liberty and you know it. What is it, Jake?"

He handed it to her. "Vishnudevananda's Yoga text. Thought there might be some of the sim-

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pler postures I could try. But I'm afraid I must stick to medita-

Joan looked puzzled. "This was downstairs?" She glanced at the endpaper, saw her bookplate: "Ex Libris—J S B Smith." "I had forgotten I owned it."

"You're a pack rat, dear. This house must have ten thousand books in it."

"More, I think. There were that many the last time I had them catalogued. Well, after you're done with it Winnie and I will look through it. We might find exercises we haven't tried." She handed it back, he put it aside. "Ready for autohypnosis?"

"Ready for prayers and I'm sorry I sounded disparaging last night."

"I can't see what difference a name makes, Jake. But first—" Joan opened her robe, lifted the necklace from her neck. "A present for you, Jake. Bend your head down."

He did so. She placed it around his neck with the ceremonial kiss. He lifted the ankh, looked at it. "Thank you, Eunice. It's a beautiful present. Am I to wear it now?"

"As you wish. Or wear it in your mind—I know you've never been one for much jewelry. Ready, Winnie?" Joan Eunice dropped her robe, melted into lotus; Winnie followed her. Jake got out of his bathrobe, leaving the necklace on, joined them.

"Jake, will you lead us tonight? No need to say 'hold' or 'breathe,' we'll stay in step. Just like last night, a prayer for each of the four parts. Keep the tempo slow."

"I'll try. Om Mani Padme Hum!"

(Om Mani Padme Hum.)

JAKE SALOMON appeared to fall asleep instantly once they put him to bed. The girls quietly left the darkened room. Joan stopped a few feet down the hall. "Winnie, will you do something for me?"

"Anything, dear."

"What time do people start stirring in the morning?"

"I don't know what time Cook gets up. About six, maybe. Mostly seven or near it. For the others, staff breakfast is at seven-thirty."

"Della doesn't matter, she never comes upstairs. I mean this floor."

"Well, cleaning starts at nine. But no one cleans near your room until you phone down for your tray. Have you been disturbed?"

"No. And I don't mean to be. I guess Hubert is the only one who worries me. I'm going back and sleep with Jake."

"Oh!"

"I'm not going this instant, I want to be sure he's sound asleep. If he sleeps all night, I shan't wake him; the poor dear needs his rest. But sleep with him I will! I don't want Hubert barging in. Can you think of a way to divert him?"

"Oh, I see. I'm pretty sure Hubert never goes to Mr. Salomon's room until Mr. Salomon sends for breakfast and Hubert takes it up. Some mornings when I've eaten downstairs and seen Hubert sit and drink coffee and watch the news, oh, quite a long time. Wait-

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ing for Mr. Salomon to phone."

"That's a relief. It's not likely that anyone but you will know it, then. Not that I mind for myself, but I would hate to be the cause of Jake being dragged into a gossip item. All right, will you do three things for me? Read or sleep in my bed a while, muss it up. Stay all night if you like but muss yours, too. And will you set your alarm for eight and if I'm not in my own bed by then, phone the Green Suite? I'm sure Jake would rather know that you knew than have us caught by someone else. Then one other thing. Would you fetch me lounging pajamas and slippers? Then, if anything slips, I'll put a bold face on it—I'll be dressed and to hell with snoops. While you get them I'm going to put my robe down here and say a few more Money Hums. My mind is made up but I'm a touch nervy. Afraid Jake will scold me, I guess. (Afraid Jake *won't* scold you, *I* guess.) (Don't you want us to, Eunice?) (Yes! Quit yattering and get on with it.)

"Right away, Joan. Oh, I'm excited myself! Uh, I think I'll sleep in your bed. If you don't mind."

"You know I don't. But I may come back and wake you, most any time."

"Don't mind. If you need a shoulder to cry on, I want to be there. Or maybe just for snuggle."

"Or I might have something to tell you. You don't fool me a bit, Winsome. Never mind, I *would* like to find you there when I return, no matter when or why."

A few minutes later Joan slipped silently into the bedroom of the Green Suite, dropped her clothing without lighting a light, found her way to the bed by Jake's soft snores. Cautiously she got into bed, felt the radiant warmth of his body close to hers, sighed happily and went to sleep.

Some indefinite time later Joan felt a hand on her in the dark, came instantly awake. (What?) (General Quarters, twin! It's *now*.) (I'm scared!) (I've taken over, dearest—the body remembers. Say a Money Hum.)

Without a word Jake firmly took possession of her.

(Oh, God, Eunice! Why didn't you *tell* me?) (Tell you what?) (That for a woman it's so much *better*!) (Is it?) (Ten times, a *hundred* times—I don't know; I'm fainting.) (How could *I* guess that it's better? Kiss him as you faint.)

XXI

THE occupation of the Oklahoma State House by the People's Agrarian Emergency Government continued. The Martian Manned Field Laboratory reported finding artifacts (age $1.4 \times 10^6 + 14\%$ years) indicating extinct human-equivalent intelligence. A second report signed by the Chinese members of the expedition denied that the exhibits were simply automatic and instinctive byproducts (analogous to coral rings, or to honeycombs) of subintelligent life closely related to the anaerobic life now present on Mars. The International Flat Earth Society in annual convention in Surrey, England, passed its usual resolution petitioning the

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United Nations to inflict sanctions on any national government wasting taxpayers' money on alleged "space travel."

The suicide rate was up for the nineteenth successive year, as were also rates for death by accident and by violence. World population appreciation passed 300,000 persons per day and continued up, with six babies born every second vs. 2.5 persons dying each second, for a net gain of seven people every two seconds.

A hen in Izard County, Arkansas, laid an egg with the Sign of the Cross on it. A spokesman for the Treasury Department, speaking off the record, announced that the Administration would not push the Administration bill for total abolition of paper currency in favor of universal credit cards and computer accounting. "We must face the fact," he told the Washington Press Club, "that black market transactions, bribes, and other quasi-legal exchanges are as much part of our economy as is interest on the National Debt, and that to create conditions which would make these voluntary exchanges impractical would bring on a depression the country could not stand. To put it poetically, gentlemen, the small amount of physical currency still in circulation—only a few billion—is our lubricant for the gears of progress. You have my assurance that the President recognizes this truth."

The First Satanist Church, Inc., (forty-four branches in California, five in other states) brought suit in Federal Court for relief from "discriminatory taxation." The First Disciple stated: "If other churches aren't badgered and taxed and investigated concerning their sacred objects, a Glory Hand should enjoy the same protection—that's American as apple pie!" Reno again repealed its ordinance for licensed prostitution. The City Manager stated that the fees weren't sufficient to pay the inspectors . . . and besides, there wasn't all that much commercial prostitution anyhow since the closing of the Federal Youth Training Center.

The Rally for Human Beings gained speed in its drive to fold, spindle and mutilate computer cards and drop them into the nearest mail box—despite arrests by Postal Inspectors there was almost no cooperation by local police and no jury had brought in a verdict of guilty no matter how compelling the evidence. The Post Office's Chief Inspector stated that the mutilated cards were almost always bills and that, so far, no mutilated checks or money orders had been reported—and that the government had no great interest in the matter but he was getting damn sick and tired of the country's mail boxes being used as trash baskets.

The chairman of the Rally for Human Beings answered that the country's mail boxes had been trash baskets for years and both the Postmaster General and Congress knew why. The traffic computer for downtown Houston went into spastic breakdown during the evening rush hour leaving thousands of people stranded on the streets overnight; the estimated

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deaths exceeded seven thousand, including heart stoppage, smog poisoning, and mugging, but excluding suicide. The Southern States Automobile Assurance Companies Trade Association repudiated all claims based on the incident on the theory that deaths or injuries in stationary vehicles were not covered by the (fine print).

The Lunar Colonies dedicated two more superlarge "balanced-aquarium" Food Caves, The *George Washington Carver* and the *Gregor Mendel*, and the Commission again announced an increase in subsidized outmigration quota but again with no relaxation in standards (the injunction against the Commission issued by Mr. Justice Handy of the United States Supreme Court was quietly ignored on the grounds of no jurisdiction). The common stock of Las-Vegas-in-the-Sky continued to move up against the downward trend of the Market; most investment advice peddlers remained bullish, basing their expectations on past correlations between weather, the Market, and women's styles. The Interstellar Advisory Subcommittee to the Lunar Commission settled on Tau Ceti rather than Alpha Centauri for the first attempt. Jodrell Bank lost touch with the Manned Pluto Probe. The (official) casualties in Ukraine dropped below the (official) casualties in Matto Grosso—and in both places the dead did not argue.

"—whereas 'id' is *not* a scientific concept; it is merely the first syllable of '*idiot*!' . . . as my esteemed colleague should know best" "—will be order in the courtroom." "—let me cite the incontestable conclusions of that *great* scientist—" "garbage in, garbage out! Any graduate assistant can draw pretty graphs and make half-bright conclusions from irrelevant data." "May I ask my esteemed colleague to repeat that slur outside the courtroom?" "—Bailiff is directed to keep order during—" ("Jake, with any luck we'll get this so fouled up that no-we'll get this so fouled up that *nobody* can play left field.")

"—with those bright lights. Don't shine them in *my* eyes, or KPOX will lack your services a few days." "—inquire of the Court whether esteemed Counsel has any serious purpose in subjecting the Court and these spectators to the offensive sight of this grisly carcass?" ("—can't stand it myself, Jake; did I *really* look that bad? I still think we should take a dive on this." "Hush, dear, Mac knows what he is doing and so do I.") "—respectfully suggest that the witness himself should be conclusively identified before his testimony can be used to identify another person." "—State and County. This set of prints I am now projecting on the screen you have just seen me take from the cadaver marked exhibit MM. I will now compare them with prints supplied by Veterans Administration Archives and previously marked as exhibit JJ, using jump-stereo superposition—" "—personally take those photographs which you now hold and which have been tentatively marked as exhibit SS, numbers one through

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one hundred twenty-seven?"

"—will *not* be cleared. This will be a public hearing. But the Court will take time to sentence for contempt as needed, and, Evelyn, you can start by putting that spectator, *that* one, the woman with the glasses and the fright wig, on ice for ten days. Get her name, give it to the Clerk, take her away. Any more morons who can't keep quiet? You back there, eating a candy bar; stuff it into your pocket—this is not a lunch room."

"Is Counsel for the challenged party suggesting that this is *not* José Branca?" "Goodness, no, I'll help identify him if you need me. I'm simply urging that you lay a proper foundation." ("Jake, Joe looks ghastly. I *must* go see him as soon as this nonsense is over." "Do you think that is wise?" "I don't know, Jake. But I know that I *must*.")

"Look around you, Mr. Branca. Tell the Court—tell the Judge, that is—whether or not your wife is in this room?" "Not here." "Mr. Branca, look where I am pointing." "Not here, I told you!" "Your Honor, we are faced with a reluctant witness. It becomes necessary to lead him." "Very well. But Counsel is reminded that he cannot impeach his own witness." "Thank you, Your Honor. Mr. Branca, I am pointing at this young woman, look at her closely. I have my hand on her shoulder—" "Keep your hands to yourself! Judge, if he puts a hand on me again, I'll bite it!" "Order. Counsel, it is not necessary to touch the challenged party, and you will not do so again. Your witness knows which young woman you mean." "Very well, Your Honor—and if I have given offense to this young lady, I am sorry. Mr. Branca, I put it to you that this is your wife, Eunice Branca née Evans."

"Not Eunice. She dead. Judge, do I gotta take this kark? That lyin' fixer knows t' score, he talk to me two, three hours. Sure, that's Eunice' *body*. But she's *dead*. Everybody knows what happen."

"Sorry, Your Honor. Mr. Branca, please confine yourself to answering my questions. You say your wife is dead . . . but did you ever *see* your wife Euncie Branca dead?"

"Huh? No. This operation—"

"Just answer the question. You never at any time saw her dead. I put it to you that you were paid one million dollars to testify that this woman is not your wife Eunice Branca." ("Jake, can they do this to Joe? Look at him." "I'm sorry, darling. I didn't call him.")

"Judge, this karky bastard's *lyin*'! They got this club, see? Rare Blood. I got this funny blood, see? Eunice, too. Save lives. Sure, they offer money, thousand, million, I don't know, don't care. You think I'm a pimp, maybe? For *Eunice*? I tell 'em shove it. I—"

"Your Honor, I pray your help in bringing this witness to order."

"I think he's making a responsive answer to your question. Go on, Mr. Branca. They offered you money. For what?"

"Oh. Eunice got a boss, see? Mr. Smith. Johann Smith. So rich he karks in gold pot. But poor old

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muck is dying, see? Only the medicares don' let him die. Pitiful. But he's got this same funny blood, see? Like me, like Eunice. I tell 'em, sure, he can have Eunice' body, she don' need it no more—but *not* for money. So we rig a swindle—me and his fixer over there, Mr. Jake Salomon. He knows how I feel, he helps. 'Eunice Evans Branca Memorial Fund for *Free* Rare Blood'—all paid to t' Rare Blood Club. Ask Mr. Jake Salomon, he knows. I . . . don' . . . touch . . . one . . . God damn' frimpin' *dime*!" (Jake—he won't even look at me." "Put your veil up, dear, and cry under it.")

"Does Counsel for Petitioners have any more questions to ask this witness?"

"No, Your Honor. Counsel may inquire."

"No cross-examination, Your Honor."

"Does either counsel wish to question this witness at a later time? This is not a trial and the Court intends to allow the widest latitude for inquiry even at the cost of permitting irrelevancies to creep into the record. Will Counsel please answer?"

"Petitioners have no further use for this witness."

"No questions now or later, Your Honor."

"Very well. Court will reconvene at ten tomorrow morning. Bailiff is directed to provide this witness with transportation home or wherever he wishes to go, and to protect him from annoyance in so doing. Off the top, Evelyn, he's been harried enough."

"Judge? Can I say sump'n?"

"If you wish, Mr. Branca."

"That karky fixer—not Mr. Salomon, other one. Gets dark every night. Some nights he winds up in Bird's Nest turf."

"Order. Mr. Branca, you must not make threats in court."

" 'Wasn't no threat, Judge. Was *prophesying*. *I* wouldn't hurt anybody. But Eunice had lots and lots and *lots* of friends."

"Very well. You're excused, Mr. Branca; you won't have to come back. Clerk will take charge of exhibits; Bailiff will provide heel-and-toe guards. Recessed."

"ALL rise!" "—greatest possible respect for the scholarly qualifications of my distinguished colleague, nevertheless the opinions he has expressed are the most arrant nonsense, as proved by that *great* scientist in his paper of nineteen-seventy-six from which I now quote: 'The very concept of "personality" is but a shadow of a figment of a fantasy of a pre-scientific speculation. *All* life phenomena are fully explained by the laws of biochemistry as exemplified—' " "—even an existential phenomenology requires a teleological foundation and I so concede, but a close study of dialectical materialism proves to any but the hopelessly biased that—" "Who's in charge here?" "An unborn child is not person; it is merely an inchoate protoplasmic structure with a potentiality to become *from its environment*" "—mathematical laws of genetic inheritance account for every possible event mis-

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named—" "—in words familiar to the Court and to everyone: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

"—*shocked* to discover that the learned judge presiding over this trial is in fact a fraternity brother of Johann S. B. Smith. This clandestine relationship may be verified in records open to the public and I ask that this Court today, and any later courts seeing this record, take judicial notice, and I demand that opposing counsel stipulate the fact."

"Stipulated." ("Jake, how did they find out?" "We leaked it. Through Alec, last night. Time to get it into the record, rather than in an appeal.")

"Aha! This damning fact having been stipulated, Petitioners are now forced to demand that the judge presiding disqualify himself and declare this a mistrial." ("Jake, seems to me they've got us on the hip. Much as I like Mac and Alec, I have to admit that this has the flavor of finding a strawberry mark on a missing heir." "No, my dear. In the course of a long life a prominent man acquires direct linkage to every other prominent man. If it hadn't turned out that you and Mac were in the same fraternity, it would have been some other link as close or closer. How many members of the Supreme Court do you know?" "Uh . . . I think it's five." "There's your answer. At the top of the pyramid everybody knows everybody else.") (And sleeps with them.) (Shut up, Eunice!)

"Counsel, I find this interesting. First let me set you straight on a point of law. Twice you have used the word 'trial' and now you speak of a 'mistrial.' This is, as you know, not a trial, it is not even an adversary situation; it is merely an inquiry for the purpose determining the identity of the young woman there who calls herself Miss Smith. She is charged with no crime, no civil suit against her is before this court; it is simply that her claimed identity has been challenged by petitioners who assert an interest. So this court is assisting in a friendly investigation —helping like a good neighbor in attempting to straighten out a mixup. *Not* a trial."

"I stand corrected, Your Honor."

"Please be careful in your use of technical language. If there is no trial, there can be no mistrial. Do you agree?"

"Perhaps I should use other language, Your Honor. Petitioners feel that, under these disclosed circumstances, you are not the judge who should preside over this, uh, friendly investigation."

"That is possible. But the matter *has* reached me in the course of due process and it will continue to remain before me unless compelling reasons are shown why I should step aside. Again on the matter of language, you used the word 'clandestine.' The Court will not *at this moment* consider whether or not Counsel's choice of this word implies contempt—"

"Your Honor, I assure you—"

"Order. I am speaking. Nor will *you* discuss that aspect at this time. We will now consider only

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the meaning of this word. 'Clandestine' means 'hidden, secret, concealed' with a flavor or connotation of surreptitious, or underhanded, or illicit. Tell me—this alleged relationship: Could it be verified in 'Who's Who'?"

"Oh, certainly, Your Honor! That's where I found it."

"I know that my own fraternity is noted there; I assume that if appropriate it would be listed in the case of Johann Sebastian Bach Smith. Since you tell me that you have checked it, the Court takes judicial notice for whatever it is worth and requires no further substantiation . . . other than to comment that we could hardly have been members of the same chapter at the same time since we differ by almost half a century in age. Did your investigations show that Johann Smith and I were jointly members of other organizations? For example Johann Smith was a founding member of the Gibraltar Club—and I am a member, and Miss Smith's counsel Mr. Salomon is a member . . . and *you* are a member. In what other organizations do I share membership with Johann Smith? Now or in the past."

"Uh . . . Petitioners have not investigated."

"Oh, come now, I feel sure that you could turn up others. The Red Cross, for example. Probably the Chamber of Commerce at some time. I seem to recall that when I was a Scout Commissioner Johann Smith was one also. Possibly we're both in other fraternal bodies. Almost certainly we have served as trustees, or such, for the same charitable or service groups, either simultaneously or successively. I note that you are a Shriner, so am I. Care to comment on the fact?"

"No comment, Your Honor."

"But you and I almost certainly share several fraternal bonds. The Court takes notice of the wry fact that, since lawyers are not permitted to advertise, as a class they tend to join more organizations—fraternal, social, service, and religious—than do laymen as a class. Since you choose not to comment on the ones that you and I share in common, the Court will on its own motion investigate and place the results in the record. Now as to my alleged obligation to disqualify myself, do you wish to clarify your reasoning? Think it over while we take a recess. Your answer will go into the record. Ten minutes."

"ORDER. Counsel for the Petitioners? You have had time to think."

"Petitioners move that all remarks concerning fraternal associations and like matters be struck from the record."

"Motion denied. *Nothing* will be struck from this record. Come now, Counselor, you must have had *some* theory. State it."

"Your Honor, at the time I raised the point it seemed important. I now no longer think so."

"But you must have had a theory or you would not have raised it. Please speak freely, I want to know."

"Well . . . if Your Honor will indulge me, the disclosed fact

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seemed to admit of the possibility of prejudice on the part of the Court. No contempt is intended."

"And the Court will assume that none exists. But your answer is less than complete. Prejudice in favor of whom? The Petitioners? Because of my fraternal relationship with their grandparent?"

"What? Oh, no, Your Honor—prejudice in favor of, uh, of Miss—the challenged party."

"You are stipulating that she is *indeed* Johann Sebastian Bach Smith?" ("My God, Jake, Mac's got him biting his own tail." "Yes. *Who* has got *whom* on *whose* hip?")

"No, no, Your Honor, we are not stipulating *that*. This is the very matter we are challenging."

"But Counsel cannot have it both ways. If this young woman is *not* Johann Sebastian Bach Smith—as Petitioners allege—then she is *not* of my college fraternity. Conversely, under your own theory, she *is* Johann Sebastian Bach Smith. Which way will you have it?"

"I'm afraid I have been guilty of faulty reasoning. I pray the Court's indulgence."

"We all reason faultily at times. Are you quite finished? Shall we go on with examination of witnesses?"

"Quite finished, Your Honor."

BUT, Dr. Boyle, do you *know* that you removed the brain from this body—this cadaver, and transplanted it into the body of that woman?"

"Don't be an ass, old chap. You heard my answer."

"Your Honor, Petitioners feel that this is proper cross-examination and ask for the Court's assistance."

"The Court orders the witness to answer the questions as stated."

"Judge, you don't scare me, y' know. I am here as a voluntary witness—and I am not and never was a citizen of your quaint country. I am now a citizen of China. Your State Department promised our Foreign Affairs Minister that I would have full immunity during my entire stay if only I would appear. So don't bother to throw your weight around; it won't go. Care to see my passport? Diplomatic immunity."

"Dr. Boyle, this court is aware of your immunity. However, you have been induced to come here—at considerable expense I would assume and clearly at some inconvenience to you—to give evidence that only you can give. The Court *requests* you to answer all questions put to you, as fully, explicitly, and clearly as possible, in terms a layman can comprehend, even if it means repeating yourself. We want to find out exactly what you did and what you know of your own knowledge, which might directly or indirectly assist this court in determining the identity of this woman."

"Oh, certainly, my dear fellow—put that way. Well, let's go back and run it through again, from A to Zed. A year ago, more or less, I was approached by that old bugger over there—sorry, I mean barrister—Mr. Jacob Salomon—to do what the Sunday

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sheets call a brain transplant. I accepted the commission. After this and that—you can get the trivia from *him*—I did it. Moved a brain and some ancillary parts from one human skull to another. That brain was alive in its new digs when I left.

"Now as to *whom*. The brain donor was a very elderly male, the body donor was a young mature female. And that is about the size of it—they are covered, y' know, sterile sheeting and such, before the surgeon in charge comes in. Prepped. I can add only these hints: The male was in bad shape, kept alive by major supportive means. The female was in worse shape, she was dead—massive trauma to skull and cortex about *here*—head bashed in, I mean to say, and the yolk spattered. Dead as Queen Anne save that her body had been kept alive by extreme support measures.

"Now that unsightly hunk of pickled meat over there has had its brain et cetera removed in a fashion consistent with my own—unique—surgical techniques; I doubt if there is another surgeon alive who can do it my way. I have examined that cadaver carefully; I conclude that it is my work—and, by elimination, I conclude that it *must* be the body Salomon hired me to carve on; there is no conflicting evidence and the cadaver is not from any other case of mine.

"Identifying the young female is another matter. If her head were shaved I might look for scar tissue. If her skull were x-rayed I might look for prosthesis; teflon vitae does not throw the same shadow on a plate as does natural bone. But such tests would be only indicative; scar tissue is easily come by, and other trephining could produce similar x-ray shadow without disturbing the central nervous system."

"Dr. Boyle, let us stipulate momentarily that you removed a living brain from exhibit JJ, the cadaver—"

"Stipulate? I *did* do so, you heard me say so."

"I am not contradicting you, I am simply using appropriate language. Very well, you have so testified and you have also testified that you transplanted that brain into a young female body. Look about and see if you can identify that female body."

"Oh, you're being an ass again. I am neither a witch doctor nor a beauty contest judge; I am a surgeon. No, thank you. If that young woman—that composite human, female body, male brain—survived and is alive today—a point on which I have no opinion of my *own* knowledge and I assure you that I have had strong reason to acquaint myself both with relevant forensic medicine and medical jurisprudence; you are not about to trip me into being the ass you are—I would not today be able to single her out with certainty from ten thousand other young women of approximately the same size, weight, build, skin shade, and such. Counsel, have you ever seen a human body hooked up for extreme life support and prepared for such surgery? I'm sure you have not or

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you would not ask such silly questions. But I assure you that you would not recognize your own wife under such circumstances. If you want me to perjure myself, you've come to the wrong shop."

"Your Honor, Petitioners seem unable to get a responsive answer on this key point."

"The Court finds it responsive. Witness states that he can and does identify the male body but is unable to identify the female body. Doctor, I confess that I am puzzled on one point—perhaps through not being a medical man myself; nevertheless I am puzzled. Are we to understand that you would perform such an operation without being certain of the identity of the bodies?"

"Judge, I've never been one to fret about trivia. Mr. Salomon assured me, in legalistic language, that the fix was on if I have your American idiom correct. His assurances meant to me that the paper work was done, the legal requirements met, et cetera, and that I was free to operate. I believed him and did so. Was I mistaken? Should I expect an attempt to extradite me after I return home? I think it would be difficult; I have at last found a country where my work is respected."

"I am not aware that anyone has any intention of trying to extradite you. I was curious, that's all. What Counsel was getting at is this: There is present in this room a woman who claims to be that composite from your surgery. You can't point her out?"

"Oh, certainly I can. Though not as a sworn witness. It's that young lady seated by Jake Salomon. How are you, my dear? Feeling chipper?"

"Very much so, Doctor."

"Sorry if I've disappointed you. Oh, I *could* make positive identification . . . by sawing off the top of your skull, then digging out your brain and looking for certain indications. But—heh heh!—you would not be much use to yourself afterwards. I prefer seeing you alive, a monument to my skill."

"I prefer it, too, Doctor—and truly, I'm not disappointed. I'm eternally grateful to you."

"Your Honor, this is hardly proper!"

"Counsel, I will be the judge of that. Under these most unusual circumstances I will permit a few human amenities in court."

"Miss Smith, I'd like to examine you before I go home. For my journal, you know."

"Certainly, Doctor! Anything—short of sawing off my skull."

"Oh, just chest-thumping and such. The usual rituals. Shall we say tommorow morning, ten o'clockish?"

"My car will be waiting for you at nine-thirty, Doctor. Or earlier, if you will do me the honor of having breakfast with me."

"The Court finds it necessary to interrupt. I'm sorry to say that both of you will be *here* at ten o'clock. The hour for recessing is almost on us and—"

"No, Judge."

"What, Dr. Boyle?"

"I said, 'No.' I will not be here tomorrow morning. I speak this evening at twenty o'clock at a din-

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ner of one of your chop-'em-up societies. The American College of Surgeons. Until shortly before that time I am at your disposal. I suppose you can require the presence of Miss Smith tomorrow morning, but not mine. I'm off to merry old China as quickly as possible. No shortage of opportunities for research there—you would be amazed what condemned prisoners will agree to. So I shan't waste another day on silly-ass questions. But I am willing to tolerate them now."

"Mmm— I'm afraid that the Court must concede that this is a case of Mahomet and the Mountain. Very well, we will *not* recess at the usual hour."

"WITNESS will stand down. Do Petitioners offer more witnesses?"

"No, Your Honor."

"Counsel?"

"Miss Johann Smith offers no further evidence."

"Mr. Salomon, is it your intention to present an argument or summary?"

"No, Your Honor. The facts speak for themselves."

"Petitioners?"

"Your Honor, it is your intention to bring this to a terminus *today*?"

"That's what I am trying to find out. We've been at this for many weary days and I find myself in sympathy with Dr. Boyle's attitude: Let's sweep up the mess and go home. Both sides agree that there are no more witnesses, no more questions, no more exhibits. Counsel for Miss Smith states that he will not offer an argument. If Petitioners' counsel wishes to argue, he may do so—in which case Miss Smith, in person or through counsel or both, is privileged to rebut. What I had in mind, Counsel, was a recess . . . then, if you have your thoughts in order, you can say what you wish. If you can't we can let it go over till tomorrow morning. You may at that time argue for a postponement—but I warn you that a lengthy postponement will not be tolerated; the Court has become impatient with delaying tactics and red herrings, not to mention language and attitudes flavored with contempt. What is your wish?"

"May it please the court, if we continue this evening, how long a recess does the court contemplate?"

"—and rebuttal having been concluded, we are ready to rule. But first a statement by the Court. Inasmuch as a novel point in Constitutional Law is involved in this matter, if an appeal is made, the Court will, under the Declaratory Relief Act of 1984, on its own motion send the matter directly to Federal Appellate Court with recommendation that it be referred at once to the Supreme Court. We cannot say that this will happen but there are aspects which lead us to believe that it could happen; this matter is not trivial.

"We have heard the petition, we have heard witnesses and seen exhibits. It is possible to rule in one of four ways:

"That both Johann Sebastian Bach Smith and Eunice Evans Branca are alive and among us;

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"That Eunice is alive and Johann is dead;

"That Eunice is dead and Johann is alive;

"That both Eunice and Johann are dead.

"The Court rules—please stand up, Miss Smith—that this person before us is a physiological composite of the body of Eunice Evans Branca and the brain of Johann Sebastian Bach Smith and that in accordance with the equitable principle set forth in 'Estate of Henry M. Parsons vs Rhode Island' this female person is Johann Sebastian Bach Smith."

XXII

"—take it that you are offering me your lovely body. Sorry, m'dear. I have no interest in women. Nor in men. Nor in rubber garments or high heels or other toys. I'm a sadist, Miss Smith. A *genius* sadist who realized quite young that he must become a surgeon to stay out of the clutches of Jack Ketch. Sublimation, y'know. Thanks just the same. A pity, you do have a magnificent body." (Well, Boss, you got turned down. It's a lesson every woman must learn. So you brush your hair and start all over again.)

(Eunice, I'm relieved. But, he was entitled to the lagniappe if he wanted it.) "I'm your Galatea, Dr. Boyle; I owe you anything you care to name—short of sawing off my skull. The debt remains on the books. All I was offering was symbolic downpayment. But you don't respond like a typical Australian—nor sound much like one, either."

"Oh, that. I'm a fake, dear. From the Sydney slums into a sadists' finishing school—a stylish British boarding school, a 'public' school right out of the second drawer. Then on to the University of London and the best surgeons in the world. Put your pretty robe on and I'll be going. I say, would you mind having that extr'ordinary slow-motion somersault filmed in stereocinema for my archives?"

"Where shall I send it, Doctor?"

"Jake Salomon knows. Keep your pecker up, m'dear, and try to live a long time; you're my masterpiece."

"I'll certainly try."

"Do. Ta ta!"

AN UNIDENTIFIED flying object roughly disc-shaped was reported to have landed in Pernambuco and its humanoid crew to have visited with local yokels; the report was denied officially almost faster than it reached the news services. The number of licensed private police in the United States reached triple the number of public peace officers. Miss Joan—née Johann—Smith received over two thousand proposals of marriage, more than that number of less formal proposals, one hundred eighty-seven death threats, an undisclosed number of extortion notes and four bombs—not any of which she received in person as they were diverted to Mercury Private Courier Service under procedures set up years earlier. The waldoes of one package-opening bunker had to be replaced; the other bombs were disarmed.

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The Postmaster General died from an overdose of barbiturates; the career Assistant Postmaster General declined an interim appointment and put in for retirement. A woman in Albany gave birth to a "faun" which was baptized, dead, and cremated in eighty-seven minutes. No flowers. No photographs. No interviews—but the priest wrote a letter to his seminary roommate. The F.B.I. reported that recidivism was up to 71%, while the same rate figured only on major felonies—armed robbery, rape, assault with a deadly weapon, murder, and attempted murder—had climbed to 84%. The paralysis at Harvard University continued.

"JAKE, the last time you refused to marry me, you *did* promise me a night on the town if we won."

Mr. Salomon put down his cup. "A delightful lunch, my dear. As I recall, you told me at the time that a night club check was no substitute for a marriage license."

"Nor is it. But I haven't nagged you about marrying me since you accorded me the honor of first concubine. Uh . . . erase 'first.' I have no idea what you do with your time when you're not here. Well, I don't have to be 'first.' " (Twin, never crowd a man about sex. He'll lie.) (Pussy cat, I'm *not* crowding Jake about *sex*; I'm confusing the issue. He's going to take us night-clubbing and we're going to wear that lush blue-and-gold job—it's meant to be seen, not just modeled for Winnie and put away.)

"Eunice, surely you don't think I have anyone else?"

"It would be presumptuous of me to have an opinion, sir. Jake, I've stayed close to home all during this hearing—a little shopping, mostly with Winnie along. But now we've won and I see no reason to be a prisoner. Look, dear, we can make it a party of four—a girl for you and a boy for me—and you can come home early and not lose any sleep you don't want to."

"You surely don't think that I would go home and leave you at a night club?"

"I surely think I can stay up all night and celebrate if I want to. I'm free, over twenty-one—my *God*, am I over twenty-one! —and can afford a licensed escort. But there is no reason to keep you up all night. We'll call Gold Seal Bonded Escorts and fill out our party. Winnie's been teaching me what the kids call dancing—and I've been teaching her real dancing. Say, maybe you'd rather escort Winnie than some dollikin picked out of a catalog? Winnie thinks you're wonderful."

"Eunice, are you seriously proposing to hire a gigolo?"

"Jake, I'm not going to marry him, I'm not even going to sleep with him. I expect him to dance with me, smile, and make polite conversation—at about what a plumber charges. This is doom?"

"I won't have it."

"If you won't—and Heaven knows I would rather be on your arm than that of a paid escort—will you take a nap? I'll get a nap, too. Do you need help to get to

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sleep? Money Hums, I mean, not horizontal calisthenics. Although we have that in stock, too."

"I don't recall saying that we were going out. Nor is there anything to celebrate, Eunice. We haven't won until the Supreme Court rules on it."

"We have plenty to celebrate. I'm legally *me*—thanks to you, darling—and you no longer have to report as my conservator; my granddaughters have lost on all points. If we hold off celebrating until the Supreme Court maunders over it, we might both be dead."

"Oh, nonsense! You know I'm about to leave for Washington; I expect to be able to arrange for an early spot on the calendar. Be patient."

"Patient is what I'm *not*, dear. Surely, you'll arrange it; you alwasys do arrange things—and the Administration owes me that and will expect more from me. But, Jake, your jet might crash—"

"That doesn't sway me, it's my death-of-choice. Since my genetic background doesn't permit me to hope for heart failure, I've been counting on cancer. But a crash is still better. Anything but a long, slow, helpless dying."

"You're rubbing my nose in the mistake I made, sir. Will you let me finish? You once pointed out that you had only ten or twelve years, based on the actuarials—whereas I had at least half a century. Not true, Jake. *My* life expectancy is null."

"Eunice, what the devil are you talking about?"

"The truth. Truth you have conveniently forgotten—but which I am aware of every golden second. I'm a transplant, Jake. A *unique* transplant. No statistics apply to me. Nobody knows, no one can guess. So I live each wonderful day as all eternity. Jake my beloved master, I'm not being morbid—I'm being happy. When I was a little boy there was a prayer Mama taught me. It goes—

"Now I lay me down to sleep;

"I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

"If I should die before I wake,

"I pray the Lord my soul to take.

"It's like that, Jake. I had not used the prayer in almost ninety years. But now I use it . . . and go happily to sleep, unworried about tomorrow." (Twin! You lying little bitch! All you ever say is a Money Hum.) (It's the same thing, Puss. A prayer means what you want it to mean.)

"Joan Eunice, you once told me that you had no religion. So why do you say this child's prayer?"

"As I recall, what I told you was that I had been a relaxed agnostic—until I was dead for a while. I'm still an agnostic—meaning that I don't have any answers—but I am now a *happy* agnostic, one who feels sure deep in her heart that the world has meaning, is somehow good, and that my being here has purpose, even if I don't know what it is. As for that prayer, a prayer means whatever you make it mean; it's an inner ritual. What this one means to me is a good intention—to live every moment as Eunice would live it,

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did live—serenely, happily, and unworried by any later moment including death. Jake, you said you were still worried about Parkinson."

"Somewhat. As a lawyer, I don't see how he can get his hands on it again. But as a shyster at heart—don't quote me! —who has taken part in many a back-room deal, I know that even the Supreme Court is made up of men, not angels met in judgment. Eunice, there are five honest men on that court . . . and four from whom I would never buy a used car. But of the honest ones, one is senile. We'll see what we shall see."

"So we will, Jake. But don't give Parky a thought. The worst he can do is to strip me of money. Which I wouldn't mind; I've discovered that more money than is needed for current bills is a burden. Jake, I've got enough tucked away that even you don't know about, that I'll never miss any meals. Parky con't touch it. As for Parky himself, I've erased him from my universe and suggest that you do likewise. He's damned by his own I.Q.—leave him to nature."

Salomon grinned. "Okay, I'll try."

"AND now you go do whatever it is you have to do and forget that I tried to inveigle you into a pub crawl." (Twin, you're giving up too easily.) (Who is giving up?)

"Eunice, if you really want to—"

"No, no, Jake! Your heart's not in it. While you are in Washington I may sample the flesh pots of this decadent village but I promise you that I will be closely guarded. Shorty, probably; he frightens people just with his size. Nor will I go alone; Alec told me that he and Mac didn't have much trouble slipping the leash, and Winnie can make a fourth."

"Eunice."

"Yes, dear?"

"I am like hell going to step aside for those two wolves."

"Why, Jake, you sound jealous!"

"No. God save me from falling prey to *that* masochistic vice. But if you want to see the seamy side of this ant hill, I'll find out where the action is and take you there. Dress for it, girl—I'm going to shake the moths off my drinkin' clothes. Formal, I mean."

"Bare breasts?" (Could you have done better, Pussy cat?) (Pick up the pup, twin. I concede.)

" 'Much too good for the common people.' Unless you intend to paint heavily, plus a lot of that sparkly glitter stuff."

"I'll try to do you proud, dear. But you *will* take a nap? Please."

"A long nap at once and a dinner tray in my room. H-hour is twenty-two hundred. Be ready or we jump off without you."

"I'm scared. Want help to get to sleep? Me? Or Winnie? Or both?"

"No, I've learned how to do it myself. Perfectly. Though I admit it's more fun with two pretty little girls chanting with me. *You* get a nap. I may keep you up all night."

"Yes, sir."

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"And now, if I may be excused." Mr. Salomon stood up, bent over her hand and kissed it. "Adios."

"Come back here and kiss me right!"

He glanced over his shoulder. "Later, my dear. I don't believe in letting women be notional." He left.

(Who won that round, Boss?) (He thinks he did, Eunice—and you tell me that's how it ought to be.) (You're learning, twin, you're learning.)

They had been lunching in her lounge. She went into her boudoir, sat down at her stenodesk to phone—picking it rather than the viewphone because its phone was *not* a viewphone. She used it with hush and with ear plugs.

Shortly she was answered: "Dr. Garcia's office."

"This is Mrs. McIntyre's secretary. Is the Doctor in and, if so, can he spare a moment to speak to Mrs. McIntyre?"

"Please hold. I will inquire."

Joan passed the time reciting her meditation prayer, was calm when he answered, "Dr. Garcia speaking."

"Mrs. McIntyre's secretary, Doctor—hush and secure?"

"Of course, Eunice."

"Roberto dear, do you have news for me?"

" 'The Greeks have captured Athens.' "

"*Oh*! You're certain?"

"No possible doubt, Eunice. But *don't* panic. You can have a D. and C. at once with no chance of your privacy being breached. I'll get Dr. Kystra, the best possible man and utterly trustworthy. I'll assist, there won't even be a nurse present."

"Oh, Roberto, no, no, no! You don't understand, dear—I'm going to have this baby if it's the last thing I ever do. You've made me terribly happy." (Now we've *really* got something to celebrate, Boss, darling. But don't tell Jake, huh?) (Nobody, just yet. How soon does our belly bulge?) (Not for weeks, if you don't eat like a pig.) (I want pickles and ice cream this instant.) (So don't.)

The Doctor answered slowly, "I misunderstood the situation. But you seemed quite nervous when I took the specimen."

"Certainly I was, dear; I was scared silly that I might *not* have caught."

"Uh . . . Eunice, I can't help feeling personally responsible. I know you're wealthy—but a marriage contract can exclude any 'fortune hunter' possibility and—well, I'm available."

"Roberto, I think that's the sweetest—and bluntest—proposal a knocked-up broad ever got. Thank you, dear; I do appreciate it. But, as you pointed out, I am wealthy—and I do not care what the neighbors think."

"Eunice, I am not simply accepting my responsibility . . . I want you to know that I do not regard marrying you as a chore."

"Roberto darling, it is *not* your responsibility. For all you know I've been sweetheart to the regiment." (We've tried, haven't we twin!) (Don't joggle my elbow, dear; he wants to be noble.) "It's *my* baby. Who helped me is my business."

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"Sorry."

"I meant that you mustn't feel *any* responsibility. If you *did* help me, I'm grateful. I'm grateful even if you didn't. Roberto? Instead of trying to make an honest woman out of me—difficult—why don't you remove that implant from Winnie's pretty thigh, then place another sort of implant where it will do the most good . . . then make an honest woman out of *her*. Much easier, she leans that way."

"It's a thought. Truthfully it's a thought I've considered quite a lot lately. But she doesn't want to leave you."

"She need not. Oh, she could stop pretending to be my maid, but this is a big old barn, several spare suites. If you get her pregnant, she and I could chum and giggle about it and have our babies almost together. I'll shut up and stop trying to run your life. Two questions—I had planned to go out on the town tonight, to celebrate the good news I expected to hear from you. Must I stick to soft drinks now?"

"Not at all. Shortly we'll put you on a diet and limit your drinking. But tonight you could get stinking drunk and the only effect would be a hangover. You don't lose a baby that easily . . . as millions of women have learned."

"May not get stinking but I may soak up several glasses of bubbly. Last question— If you're able to sign off, would it suit you to lose a night's sleep helping me celebrate? Officially it's to celebrate our court victory. That 'the Greeks have captured Athens' will remain our secret a while longer."

"Uh—"

"You sound fretted, dear."

"Well, to tell the truth I have a date with Winnie."

"Oh! I expressed myself badly. *I* have a date with Jake; I hope that you and Winnie can make it a four. I wasn't asking you to spend a night with me in that sense—although I certainly would not be averse if it could be managed some other time without hurting Winsome. The moments you and I have been able to steal have been too short, dear. I think you are a man it would be sweet to be leisurely with."

"I *know* that you are such a woman, Eunice."

"Go along with you, you tell that to all your female patients. Doctor, you are a delightful wolf. Will you wait ten minutes before phoning Winnie? I have a favor I want to ask of her."

"Ten minutes."

"Thank you, Roberto. Off."

JOAN switched to the house intercom. "Winnie? Are you busy, dear?"

"Just reading. Be right in."

Joan met her at their connecting door. "Nothing much, hon. I want you to call O'Neil and tell him that I wish to speak to Finchley. In my lounge. Sure, I could phone O'Neil myself, sweet, but I want it to look more formal."

"Sure, Joanie. Do I stay and chaperone?"

"Winsome, you know darn well that all I ever want is fake chaperonage—and sometimes a jigger. This time I don't need a jigger—

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but I do want to ask Finchley something privately and he will speak more freely if you aren't around. So let him into my lounge, come tell me he has arrived and don't come back in. Go on into your own room and close the door. Then stay there—you are going to receive a phone call in about eight minutes."

"I am?"

"Yes, and a nice one. You and I and Jake and Dr. Garcia are going night-clubbing tonight."

"*Oh*!"

"And when we get home just keep him here the rest of the night and I'll see to it that Jake doesn't twig. Or does he know who 'Bob' is?"

"Uh . . . yes, he does. I told him."

"It may still suit dear Doctor to cover up; men are shy. Now skedaddle, dear, and phone O'Neil."

Four minutes later Winnie announced Finchley and left the lounge. He said, "You sent for me, Miss?"

"Tom Cat, these doors are soundproof; you can stop being formal."

He relaxed a little. "Okay, Pussy Cat."

"So give us a kiss and sit down. That hall door locks itself. Winnie is the only one who could walk in and she won't."

"Pussy Cat, sometimes you make me nervous."

"Oh, piffle." She moved into his arms. "I do have a question to ask you—advice that I want. You can discuss it with O'Neil and get his advice, and any of the guards. But it is *your* advice I want; the rest is coverup."

"Woman, quit talking and shove me some mouth."

Joan did so, a long thorough kiss. Presently he said hoarsely, "You don't have much on under this."

"I don't have *anything* on under it. But don't get me distracted, Thomas Cattus; let me get my question in. I'm going nightclubbing tonight—Jake and me, Winnie and Dr. Garcia. They're going to want to take us to cubes. *I* want to see *rough* places. I figure you know where they are."

"Mmm . . . Eunice, the up-high places are all in bad turf."

"Well, are they safe once we're inside? And can one get inside safely?"

"Uh . . . there's one, has its own inside parking and as good armor as the doors you have. Look, I'll bring up a list, addresses and so forth, and everybody's suggestions. But I'll star my own."

"Good. Thank you, Tom Cat."

"God, but you feel good. Do we have time? Can I lock that other door?"

"If I'm not worried about Winnie, why should you be? Grab a pillow and put me on the floor."

THE party made rendezvous in Joan's lounge. Jake Salomon had elected to dress with ultra old-fashioned formality: maroon tuxedo jacket and trousers, with white turtleneck. The silky knit made a splendid background for his gold ankh necklace. Dr. Garcia was just as formal in modern mode: scarlet tights boldly padded,

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stretch-fit white mess jacket with jabot of pearls and black lace. Little Winifred wore her new emerald dress with floor-length skirt—no body paint as Joan had advised but blushes caused her skin to change again and again from extremely fair to rosy glow. On her forehead in caste-mark position was a single emerald.

Jake looked at her. "Little one, what holds that solitaire in place? Insurance?"

She blushed again but answered saucily, "It's on a corkscrew, sir. Shall I unscrew it and show you?"

"No, I'm afraid you might be telling the truth."

"Never in mixed company, sir. Actually it's the adhesive we use on bandages. Won't come loose even with soap and water but alcohol takes it right off."

"Then be careful not to spill your drinks that high."

"Oh, I don't drink, Counselor; I learned my lesson long ago. I'll be drinking Cuba Libre without the 'libre' and screwdrivers with no drive to them."

"Doctor, let's leave her at home; she's just a chaperone."

"Would you make me stay home, Counselor? Just for not drinking?"

"Just for calling me 'Counselor' if you do it again. And for calling me 'sir.' Winifred, men my age do not care to be reminded of it by pretty little girls. After sundown my name is Jake."

"Yes, Counselor," Winifred answered meekly.

Jake sighed. "Doctor, some day I hope to win an argument with a woman."

"If you do, tell Dr. Rosenthal. Rosy is writing a book on the difference in mental processes between male and female."

"A dreamer. Eunice does that thing cover you any better when you stand up? And what is it?"

"It's a hula skirt, Jake. And it does." Joan Eunice was wearing a floor-length skirt, with her torso covered with a myriad glittering stars. They faded out gradually at neck and shoulders. The skirt was thousands of gold nylon threads overlying more thousands of deep blue threads.

As she was seated, the mass of threads fell away from her graceful legs. Now she stood up; the threads fell back into a solid curtain. "See, Jake? A plain gold skirt. But when I move"—she walked—"the blue underneath keeps flashing through."

"Yes, and you, too. Panties?"

"A rude question. The Polynesians never heard of pants until the missionaries corrupted them."

"That's not a responsive answer—"

"Wasn't meant to be."

"—but as long as you are standing, let's get rolling."

"Yes, dear." Joan Eunice put on a matching opaque yashmak, let Jake lay an evening cloak around her shoulders. Jake hooked on a maroon domino which covered his distinctive aquiline nose—he had been too often on video lately and felt that there was no point in concealing Miss J. S. B. Smith's face if his own face broke her cover. The Doctor donned a small white domino—having been asked to help keep the party in

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character—and Winifred wore a filmy green harem veil that was only a symbol, being of the same material as her skirt.

As they entered the lift Joan Eunice said, "Where are we going, Jake?"

"Woman, you aren't supposed to ask. The Gaslight Club, as a starter."

"It sounds like fun," Joan agreed. "A piano player with sleeve garters and such?"

"And derby hat and fake cigar—he can sing and play anything written a hundred years back. Or fake it."

I want to hear him. But, Jake, since this is to celebrate my uhuru, would you indulge me a little?"

"Probably. Show your openers."

"There's a club I've heard about . . . and while you were napping, I reserved a table for four for twenty-two thirty. I'd like to try it."

"Winnie, you haven't been coaching her enough. Eunice, you're not supposed to be capable of making such a decision—less than the dust beneath my chariot wheels and all that. All right, where is the dive? What's its name? We'll try the Gaslight later—there is a waitress there alleged to have the most pinchable bottom in the state."

"Probably foam rubber; Winnie has that distinction. It's the Pompeii-Now, Jake—I have the address in my purse."

Mr. Salomon's eyebrows appeared over his domino. "We won't need it, Eunice. That box is in an Abandoned Area."

"Does that matter? They have inside parking and assured me that they are armored against anything short of a nuke bomb."

"We would still have to get there and back."

"Oh, I have confidence in Finchley and Shorty. Don't you?" (Twin, that's a crotch chop. Not nice.) (Big sister, do you want to go to the Gaslight and listen to bad piano and watch Jake pinch bottoms? If so, say so.) (I just said it wasn't nice.) (So you phrase the next answer. Jake's a tough case.)

"Joan Eunice, when I take a lady out for the evening, we go in *my* car. Not hers."

"Whatever you say, Jake; I was trying to be helpful. I asked Finchley and he said there was a route in that the—what do they call it? —the Organization—keeps open. No doubt Finchley can tell Rockford."

"*I* call it the Mafia. If there is an acceptably safe route, Rockford knows it; he's the most expert driver in town—more experienced than your boys, he drives more."

"Jake, you don't want to go there. So let's go to the Gaslight. I want to try sticking a pin in that rubber fanny."

They went to the Pompeii-Now.

THERE was no trouble getting inside and the club had a card lounge for its patrons' mobile guards. The maître d'hôtel led them to a ringside table across from the orchestra, swept a "Reserved" sign from it. "Will this be suitable, Mr. 'Jones?' "

"Yes, thank you," agreed Salomon. Two silver-bucket stands with champagne appeared as they

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sat down; the mâitre-d' took a magnum from the sommelier and displayed it to Salomon, who said, "That's a poor year for Pol Roger. No Dom Pérignon '95?"

"At once, sir." The sommelier hurried away. The mâitre d'hôtel asked, "Is there anything else not to your liking, sir?"

Joan Eunice leaned toward Jake. "Please tell him that I don't like this chair. It was designed by Torquemada."

The floor manager looked upset. "I'm sorry Madame feels that way about our chairs. They were supplied by the number-one hotel and restaurant supply company."

"As may be," Joan answered, "but if you think I'm going to spend an evening perched on a shooting stick and pretend that it's fun, you are mistaken. Jake, we should have gone to the Gaslight."

"Perhaps, but we're here now. Just a moment, dear. Mâtee D'hotel—"

"Yes, sir."

"You have an office here, no doubt."

"Why, yes, sir."

"With a desk and a chair. Probably a padded swivel chair with arms and an adjustable back. A man who is on his feet as much as you are wants a comfortable chair when he does sit down."

"I do have such a chair, sir, and—while it's hardly suitable for dining room—Madame is welcome to it if it pleases her. I'll send for it."

"One moment. In a club with so many activities—you have a gaming room, do you not, and other things?—I feel sure that it is possible to round up four such chairs."

"I'll try, sir. Although our other patrons might find it odd if we supply one table with special chairs."

Mr. Salomon looked around. The place was less than half filled. "Oh, I imagine that if you explained to anyone who asked just how expensive such special service is, he might not want it. Or you might find it possible to accommodate him, too, if he is willing to pay. I think those guards pretending to be waiters standing around the edge of the room can handle anyone who is unreasonable."

"All our staff are guards, sir—in a crunch. Very well, sir, if you will be patient a few moments your party will all have desk chairs." Quickly he distributed wine cards and drug lists, and left.

Roberto and Winifred were already dancing. Joan leaned toward Jake again and said, "Jake, will you buy this place for me?"

"Does it attract you that much?"

"No, I want to make a bonfire out of these chairs. I had forgotten what indignities night clubs expect their customers to put up with."

"You're spoiled."

"I intend to be. Jake, much of what is wrong with this world would be righted if the customer screamed every time he feels cheated. But I'm not out to reform the world tonight; I simply want a comfortable chair. The cover charge—I checked it when I

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made reservations for 'Mr. Jones' —is high enough to *buy* a decent chair. What are these 'other activities?" . A whorehouse upstairs, maybe?"

"Eunice, see those three tables of beautiful people over in the corner? Attractive men and women, all young, all smiles, no frowns, and each with a champagne glass that may hold ginger ale? It's high odds that, if the Greeks had a word for it, they have a price for it."

"Why, one of those girls doesn't look more than twelve."

"She may not be that old. Who's going to check on her age, in an Abandoned Area? I thought you weren't going to reform the world tonight, my dear?"

"I'm not. If the government can't police these areas, I certainly cannot. But I hate to see children exploited." (Twin, that pretty child may have an I.Q. of 80 and no other possible profession—she may think she's lucky. Proud of her job. And seeing where she is, she's either got an implant or cut tubes —not like that cheerleader I told you about.) (Eunice, doesn't it bother you?) (Some, chum, but only some. People usually are what they are because it suits them—I learned that from Joe. The girl's mother may be one of the other pretties there—two gets you seven. Want to rescue them both?) (Oh, shut up, darling; let's have fun.) (I'm willing.)

A waitress came past, refilled their glasses. She was pretty and was dressed in sandals, cosmetics and careful depilation. She smiled and moved on. "Jake, is she one?"

"Couldn't say, I don't know the house rules. Shocked, Eunice? I told you not to come here."

"Shocked at *skin*? Jake dear, you forget that *my* generation thinks nothing of nudity."

"*Hrrrmph*! One more remark like that and I'll call you Johann the rest of the evening."

"I'll be good. Mostly. Darling, our waitress suddenly reminded me of the Chesterfield Club. Kansas City in the palmiest days of the Pendergast machine. Nineteen-thirty-four."

"In nineteen-thirty-four I was barely out of diapers, Eunice. It was something like this?"

"Not as much fake swank and lower prices even allowing for inflation. But otherwise much the same. It specialized in complete nudity even at high noon at the 'Businessman's Lunch.' Just up the street from the Federal Reserve Bank. Jake, she's headed back. Find out for me."

"How? I don't even have a hat to tip."

"Simply ask her, dear, ask her if she's available. Slip her ten dollars as you do."

The waitress came back, smiled, and said, "Have you looked over our drug list? All illegal drugs at the controlled international prices plus twenty-five percent. Guaranteed pure, we obtain them from government sources."

"Not for me, thank you, dear. Eunice? Want a trip?"

"Me? I don't even take aspirin. But I want a steady supply of champagne. And I could use a sandwich, or something. Chiquita, is there a kitchen operative now?"

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"There is always a gourmet chef on duty, Ma'am; it says so at the bottom of your wine card. Anything from snacks to Maine lobster. Would you like to see a menu?"

"No, thank you. Maybe a big platter of little sandwiches for all of us, Jake. And don't forget that other matter."

JOAN Eunice saw Jake get out a ten-dollar bill. It disappeared and Joan decided that the girl must have folded it with one hand and palmed it. Jake spoke to her in a voice lower than the music.

She smiled and answered clearly. "No, sir, I'm not even allowed to dance with customers—and I'm not in that branch of the business; I'm married. But I can arrange it." The waitress glanced toward the 'beautiful people' and looked back. "For you, sir? Or for both of you?"

"No," Jake answered. "It was just curiosity."

"*My* curiosity," Joan put in. "I'm sorry, dear; I shouldn't have made him ask you."

"Ma'am, a high roller can be as inquisitive as he wishes. Baby needs shoes." She smiled. "Twins. Boys. Two years old. I was licensed for two and now I'm arguing with the Board as to whether twins use up my license. Since twins are okay under a one-baby license. I'd like to have a little girl, too."

"Jake, be a high roller again; I want to ask"—Joan leaned forward, read the girl's name written or tattooed above her left breast—"Marie another question."

"He's paid for more than one question, really, Ma'am." But a second note disappeared as quickly as the first.

"Marie, do you live inside the turf? With kids?"

"Oh, goodness, no! My husband would never permit that. An armed bus picks me up after supper and delivers me home around breakfast time. Most of us use it. Except—" She indicated the exception by inclining her head toward the corner. "My husband is on night shift at Timken—we match up pretty well."

"Who takes care of your twins at night? Nursery?"

"Oh, no, Mama lives with us. No huhu. Actually, Ma'am, this is a good job. I've been a waitress where I had to wear uniforms—and the work was hard and the tips were small. Here the work is easy and the tips are usually high. Oh, sometimes a customer gets drunk and gropy, but I don't bruise all that easily—and drunks are often the highest tippers. Never any trouble; the guards watch everything." She smiled at Joan. "You could get a job here in two seconds, Ma'am. All it takes is a friendly manner and a good figure—and you've got both."

"Thank you, Marie."

"I'd better go, the maître-d' is bringing a party to another of my tables. 'Scuse, please—sandwiches will be right in."

The girl left. Joan said, "Jake, would you say that she has found her niche?"

"Seems so. As long as she keeps her figure and saves her money. She doesn't pile up social security

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points here; this doesn't count as a job under the rules, it's off the map."

"She doesn't pay income tax?"

"Oh, certainly! The fact that her income doesn't exist, legally, means nothing to revenooers. Though she may hold out a good portion—I would. My dear, do you want to try this music?"

"Jake, I thought you didn't dance?"

"I don't dance this modern stuff. But I can try, if you want to. I wonder if that combo can play Rock? This new stuff has so little beat I don't see why they call it dance music."

Joan chuckled. "I'm so much older that I despised Rock instead of liking it. Swinging was my era, Jake, and on back clear to the Bunny Hug—though I didn't learn to dance until the foxtrot crowded out the rest."

"I can foxtrot, I'm not all that young. But I doubt if that bunch of disappointed harpists can play one. Eunice, can you tango?"

"Try me, just try me! Learned it when Irene Castle was alive—and with this new body I'm eight times as good as I was then. Been teaching it to Winnie. Do you have a firm lead?"

"Firm enough for you, wench. I'm going to flag the maître-d'—it's possible that they can play one. It's the only tempo that has stayed evergreen through all the passing fads."

"Of course, Jake. Because the tango, danced correctly, is so sexy that you ought to get married afterwards. See if they can play one."

BUT they were interrupted by bus boys arriving with four swivel chairs and Joan decided that it would be polite to sit in hers a while, since she had made a fuss over chairs. Then sandwiches arrived and more champagne and she found she wanted both—bubbly to make her tiddly and sandwiches to soak it up so that she wouldn't get tiddly too fast. Roberto and Winifred returned to the table; Winnie said, "Oh, food! Goodbye, waistline! Bob, will you love me when I'm fat?"

"Who knows? Let's operate and find out," he answered, reaching for a sandwich with one hand and champagne with the other.

"Winsome, pour that Coke into the wine bucket and have champagne."

"Joanie, you know I mustn't. My Nemesis."

"But this time there's food to go with it . . . and not the other hazards."

Winifred blushed. "I'll get drunk. I'll get silly."

"Roberto, will you promise this poor child that, if she passes out, you'll get her home safely?" (What's safe about *home*, twin? You ought to hang out a red light.) (Nonsense, Eunice! Our man won't marry us—so what do you want me to *do*? I don't give myself to men I don't respect—and I've got *years* to make up for. I'm nearly ninety-five years old—and knocked up—and healthy—and *can't* hurt anyone physically and *won't* hurt anyone socially . . . a man's pride or anything else. Why shouldn't I be 'No-Pants Smith'?) ('Methinks the lady doth protest

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too much.' Boss, your Bible-Belt background is chafing you again. Certainly sex is no sin—but *you* don't really believe it.) (I do so! Always have. I've been almost enough of a busybody to keep *you* happy. Why do you needle me?) (Beloved Boss. You've shown amazing talent for juggling eggs and I've enjoyed every second of it and I hope you have, too.) (You *know* I have. So much I'm scared of losing my judgment. My caution, rather. Eunice, I never *dreamed* how much *more* it is, to be a woman. It's our *whole* body.)

The cabaret was crowded now; the lights changed and the floor show began—two comics. Joan listened, tried to look amused, and tried to amuse herself by trying to remember how long ago she had heard each "new" gag. She could see only one improvement in the routines: The "dirty" story of her (his) youth had disappeared. Being based on shock of breaking taboo, the dirty story had bled to death when there were no more taboos. There was sex humor—the comics used plenty of it; sex remained forever the most comical thing on a weary globe. But it was harder to work out real comedy than it once had been simply to shock.

But she applauded the comics as they left. There was a blackout and the dance floor changed instantly into a farmyard scene—and she found herself more intrigued by trying to guess the mechanics of that "magic" than she had been by the comics.

The farmyard set was used for one of the oldest (possibly the oldest, she decided) of all sex stories, and it was done in stylized, very old symbols in both costume and props: The Farmer, the Farmer's Daughter, and the City Slicker with his Hundred-Dollar Bills. It was pantomine, with theme music from the orchestra.

She whispered to Jake, "If she's a farm girl, I'm Adolf Hitler."

"What do you know about farms, my dear?"

"Plenty, for a city boy. On one nearly every summer when I was a kid. Followed the harvest in high school and college—good money, plus occasionally a farm girl. Always was a peasant at heart—wanted the biggest manure pile in the valley . . . and got it, save that it was cash. Jake? Couldn't we buy an abandoned farm? A simple little place, with drawbridge and moat, and our own power plant and water supply? Get out of this dying city?"

"If you say to, dear. Getting bored with this? Want to move on?"

"Not during their act, dear." (I'm curious to see how he fakes it.) (Me, too!)

To her surprise the entertainers did not fake it. Money caused the "farm girl" to go from offended, to coy, to consent, to active cooperation, with a hay stack as locale of consummation—and actor and actress made certain that the audience could see that it was in no way faked. Winifred blushed to her waist and never took her eyes off it.

The ending had a variation that Joan-Johann conceded was new to her-him. As motions grew vigorous and the orchestra kept time to

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loud squeals and grunts, the "Farmer" showed up (as expected) with pitchfork. But the hay caught fire, apparently from the action, and the "Farmer" dropped his pitchfork and grabbed a seltzer bottle conveniently at hand on an empty table and doused his "Daughter" and the "City Slicker" in putting out the fire—aiming first at the apparent source of the fire.

Joan decided that it rated applause. Winifred hesitantly joined in, then clapped hard when Roberto did. Jake joined in but was interrupted. "What is it, Rockford?"

JOAN turned her head, surprised. Jake's driver-guard was looking very upset. "Mr. Salomon—I've *got* to speak with you."

"You are. Speak up."

"Uh—" Rockford tried to make it just to his employer but Joan watched his lips. That crazy fool Charlie has gone got hisself killed."

"Oh, for God's sake! Where? How?"

"Just now. In the guards' lounge. Not drunk. This is a tight joint, they won't let a guard drink. We were playing stud and Charlie kept needling this Polack. No excuse and I told him to knock it off. But he didn't. Polack got sore, but tried to avoid a showdown. Charlie kept crowding him and—oh, what's the use; the Polack broke his neck. Before I could get around to that side of the table." Rockford said, "Boss? Seeing where we are, I could dump him. Best, maybe?"

"Of course not. I have to report it, the body has to go to the morgue. Damn it, Rocky, I'm his parole officer."

"Yeah, but maybe you don't know about it? He skipped. Dropped out."

"Shut up." Salomon turned to Joan. "My dear, I'm terribly sorry."

"Jake, I should never have asked you to take me into an A.A."

"That has nothing to do with it. Charlie was a congenital killer. Rockford, get the maître-d'. No, take me to the manager. Friends—Bob, Winnie—stay here please, I've got to take care of something."

Garcia said, "I caught most of it. Take me with you, Jake. I can certify death—and it's smart to get that done at once."

"Uh . . . who's going to stay with the girls?"

Joan put her hand on Jake's arm. "Jake, Winnie and I are safe—lots of guards. I think we'll go to the powder room. I need to, Winnie probably does, too. Coming, Winnie?"

THE party was over but it was two hours before they were home; too many details—tedious ones rather than legal complications, as Dr. Garcia certified death, and he, the manager, Mr. Salomon, and Rockford endorsed the certificate that death had occurred in an Abandoned Area at the hands of a party or parties unknown—in fact unknown, as the cardroom was empty save for the body. There was no point in inquir-

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ies; it had happened in an Abandoned Area and was not a crime *de facto* nor in any practical sense *de jure*. Nor did anyone weep; even Rockford did not like his driving partner, he simply respected him as a fast gun in a crunch. To Garcia Jake groused that he should have known better than to try to rehabilitate a congenital—and got no sympathy, as Garcia believed that such creatures should be exterminated as soon as identified.

Both tried to keep the grisly aspects from the ladies.

Winifred and Joan Eunice spent an hour alone at the table, fiddling with champagne and trying to look amused, while the men tidied up the mess. But Joan helped on one point: The body had to be sent to the morgue and Jake was unwilling to leave it to the management, he was certain they would dump it. Nor was he willing to send Rockford without someone to ride shotgun. So a phone was brought to Joan and she called O'Neil—was answered instantly and wondered if her Chief ever slept.

Finchley and Shorty were on duty; O'Neil said they would be rolling at once. But Joan ordered him to have them first pick up Fred, to ride shotgun for Rockford. As an afterthought she told O'Neil to have the night pantryman place a cold supper and a case of chilled

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champagne in her lounge—the "night on the town" had turned out a dismal flop; she was darned if she would let it stay that way. Charlie was better dead and his death did not rate one crocodile tear. Ten thousand human beings had died around the globe in the hour since his death—why weep over a worthless one? (Eunice, what happens to a kark like Charlie after he's dead?) (I'm no authority, Boss. Maybe the bad ones die dead—like a potter destroying damaged work.)

(I don't know its wavelength, sweetheart. Maybe you can tell me this— How can I get this party rolling again? Look at Winnie—drinking champagne but not smiling.) (Boss darling, I recommend more champagne and Money Hums, mixed fifty-fifty.) (Eunice, I thought you didn't approve of liquor?) (Never said that, Boss. I didn't drink because I didn't need it. But nothing is good or bad in itself, just in its effects. Try it. Can't hurt, might help.)

So when at last the four reached the big, ugly fortress, Eunice insisted that they go to her lounge for a nightcap and a snack. "Who knows? We might feel like dancing yet. Roberto, has Winnie introduced you to our relaxing routine? The Money Hum?"

"I've tried to teach it to him,

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Joanie. But Bob is a dreadful cynic."

"Jake, let's uncynic Roberto. I've thought of a new way to recite it. Sit in a circle and pass around a loving cup. Three recite while one drinks, and pass the cup to the next one."

"I vote Yea," Jake answered. "Doctor, if you want to be cynical, go do so by yourself—you can have the guest bed in my suite. We'll form a triangle instead."

"I had better stay to keep the party orderly."

"Very well, sir. But one unseemly word while we are at our devotions and you will be severely punished."

"How?"

Joan Eunice answered, "By having to down the loving cup unassisted, of course, and then start it again."

JOAN EUNICE woke up feeling rested but very thirsty. She glanced at the ceiling, saw that it was after ten and thought idly of turning on floor lights as a gentle preliminary to stronger light.

Then she realized that she was not alone. Should she wake Jake—gently—for a pleasant good morning? Or slide out softly and sneak back to her room and hope not to be seen? Or did it matter? Was she already a topic of gossip in her own house?

Better not wake Jake in any case; the poor darling planned to go to Washington tonight. She started to slide out of bed.

The man beside her reached out and pulled her to him. She at once gave in, went soft and boneless.

"Didn't know you were awake, dear; I meant to— *Roberto*!"

"You were expecting Santa Claus?"

"How did you get here?"

"You invited me."

"I did? Well, yes, I did. I mean I told you that you were welcome in my bed, quite a while back. But where's Jake? Did he go to sleep on us? And what about Winnie?" She thumbed on the floor lights, saw that she was, as she was beginning to suspect, in her own bed.

"Winnie's next door. In her bed. With Jake."

"Good God, Roberto—I've finally spent a night with you. And don't remember it." (*I* do! *Whee*!) (Well, *I* don't, Eunice. Not in detail. Confused.) (You're a drunken little bitch, Boss. But we had fun.) (I'm sure we did. I wish I remembered it.)

Dr. Garcia sighed. "Ah, well. I should not complain."

"It's coming back to me," she lied. "Just disoriented as I woke up. You were especially sweet to me."

"You didn't think so when I wouldn't let you go to bed with your makeup on."

Joan allowed enough general illumination to come on to let her see herself, noted that the star sequins were gone as well as body paint they had adhered to. She had not scrubbed it off herself; ergo, someone else had. Not Winnie—Winnie had been potted as a palm. "That's part of what I meant by 'especially sweet,' Roberto. Not many men would take such good care of a drunken wench. Was I hard to handle?"

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"Not really. But you were pretty tight."

"Too tight?"

"Not too tight. Just pleasantly so."

"I'm not sure I understand that and don't think I want to. Roberto darling, even if I did fuss over it, thank you for washing me. Only a slut leaves paint on when she goes to bed. I'm a tart but I don't want to be a slut." (Hi, slut!) "And thank you most of all for a wonderfully sweet night. I hope I wasn't too drunk."

"Eunice, you would be more woman passed out cold than most can manage at their best."

"I'm glad you said 'would be' rather than 'are.' But, Roberto, I'm uneasy. Not about you and me, dear, but about Winnie. Does this affect that thought you've been considering? About Winnie, I mean."

"On the contrary, Eunice, it was Winnie's idea—her notion of how to celebrate our engagement—"

"Wait a moment! Am *I* engaged to *you*?"

"Eh? No, no—I'm engaged to Winnie."

"Oh. Roberto, I would happily marry you, you would make a numero-uno esposo. But I don't need one, and Winnie does. Did I know this last night? About you two?"

"You seemed to. You said that was why you wouldn't wait to scrub off your sparklers—you were right-now about it."

"Roz. I remember being terribly eager but I seem to have drawn a blank as to why. Roberto? Did I spill the news about the 'Greeks capturing Athens?' "

"I don't think so, Eunice. Not when I was around. I'm fairly sure Winnie doesn't know it."

"I'll tell Winnie; it's Jake I want to keep in the dark."

"Eunice? Did Jake do it? Capture Athens and the Parthenon as well."

"Watch that Hippocratic Oath, dear. Parthenogenesis might be the answer. Let me keep this up in the air a while longer. You say this was *Winnie's* idea? After you told her you would marry her?"

"Yes."

"How did she ever get up the courage to propose? I've been urging her to—but she's so damn' shy. Dutch courage?"

"Yes. But my own. Sure, she's shy—but under her blushes Winnie is as rugged as a nurse has to be. She said All right—if I would let her tie it down tight that she is no angel. I told her I had no use for angels, in bed or out. She said she hoped I meant that, because she was about to ask Jake to sleep with her."

"Roberto, I missed a lot of this. How much champagne did I drink?"

"Who counts? Jake kept opening bottles and we kept passing the loving cup around. While reciting that amphigory. You got your share. We all did."

"Uh . . . am I engaged to Jake?"

"Not that I know of."

"That's good. Because when Jake finds out I'm knocked up, he's going to be noble. Just as you were, dear, but Jake will be much more difficult. And I've discovered that I don't need a husband; I just want loving friends. You. Jake.

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Winnie. Some others. People who'll love me as I am, clay feet and all—not because of a contract. Did Jake make any fuss over the sleeping arrangements?"

"Uh, truthfully I don't think anyone was displeased with Winnie's suggestion. Jake picked Winnie up under one arm and announced that he was reenacting the Rape of the Sabines."

"The faithless old darling."

"So I picked you up and carried you in and scrubbed you . . . and you squealed and protested and told me that was a hell of a way to run a rape."

"Mmm, I think I was right. 'In vino veritas.' "

"So now I'm going to put a pillow over your face so that you can't squeal and protest."

"You won't need a pillow; just put your hand over my mouth if I'm noisy. But all these doors are soundproof."

"You think I don't know it? When I lived here for most of a year? Miss Johann Smith, I know more about your house than you do."

"Oh, you bastard! Call me 'Eunice.' Or put a pillow over my face so I can't hear you. I love you, Roberto—I'm so *happy* that you're going to marry our Winsome."

"So am I, Eunice. Now shut up."

"Yes, sir." (*Unh*! Eunice, nobody ever tells me anything.) (Shut up, twin, and pay attention to what you're doing!)

JOAN EUNICE reached over for the intercom beside her bed, tapped it for Cunningham, then reached for Roberto's hand.

"Yes, Miss?"

"Cunningham, I want breakfast for four, served in my lounge."

"Yes, Miss."

"Placed in my lounge, rather, with warmers and coolers. No service. I have no idea when Mr. Salomon and Dr. Garcia will wake up, but I want to be hostessish and ready to serve them myself when they do. But Winnie and I want to eat." She winked at the doctor.

"Certainly, Miss."

"They need their sleep. Tell me, Cunningham—you've known me a long time. Have you ever pinned one on?"

"Pardon me, Miss?"

"Go on a luau, get so fried you can't find the floor with both feet. Drunk and disorderly."

"I have sometimes—in the past—come down with that ailment."

"Then you know what a delicate condition we are in—Winnie and myself at least and I have reason to believe that the gentlemen will not be in much better shape. But there was excellent excuse."

"I heard about the trouble, Miss. Too bad."

"Cunningham, I did *not* mean Charlie. This may be callous of me . . . but he was a bully who picked a fight and lost."

"Oh. If I may say so, Miss, he was not liked below stairs. Uh, we really did not like having him in the house."

"I know. I would have put a stop to it long ago except that he worked for Mr. Salomon, not me—and I owe Mr. Salomon a great deal. No, the 'excellent excuse' was something else. We were cele-

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brating an engagement."

Cunningham said cautiously, "Should I offer congratulations, Miss?"

"Yes, but not to me. Dr. Garcia is marrying Winifred."

"Oh! That's fine, Miss. But we'll miss her."

"I am hoping that we will not have to miss her. This is a big house, Cunningham, much too large for one person. Or for two whenever Mr. Salomon can be persuaded to honor us. Not often enough, that is to say—but the Counselor is afraid that he will cause gossip about me."

"Uh, may I speak plainly, Miss?"

"Any time you don't, Cunningham, I shall be offended."

"Mr. Salomon is a fine gentleman. But if he worries about that—well, it's silly, that's all I can say. The staff do *not* gossip about his presence. They respect him."

"Perhaps you can tell him, he won't listen to me. But today I'm simply concerned that he sleep as late as possible. He must go to Washington tonight, you know. When you bring up breakfast, don't go past his door; go around the other way. You can't disturb me or Winnie; we are awake. And be certain that Hubert doesn't come fussing around until Mr. Salomon sends for him."

"He won't, Miss; he never does."

"He used to, sometimes, when he was tending me—be a touch noisy when he thought I should be up. So keep him off this floor. Keep everyone off this floor until I call you—that includes all cleaning, everything. Except, of course, that I want you to bring up breakfast—with whatever help you need—promptly."

"Yes, Miss. Perhaps coffee and juice at once?"

"No, we don't want to be disturbed twice; my ears might fall off. You'll find evidence of the debacle in my lounge—a case lot of empty magnums. Remove them—quietly—for Heaven's sake don't bang one against another; I can hear an ant stomp this morning. Pencil ready? We need a simple, nourishing breakfast. At least four cups of coffee each, double oders of orange juice, half grapefruits, either pinks or the big Arizonas, scrambled eggs, poached eggs, some link sausages and breakfast steaks. Better include cold cuts and sliced cheeses. Oh, toast and muffins and jam and such. Flatbread. And a big pitcher of ice cold milk for cereal, I think this is a cereal morning. Some decent, quiet, well-brought-up cereal that doesn't snap, crackle, or pop. That's all. Unless you know a remedy for a hangover."

"Well, Miss, when I was tending Mr. Armbrust before I went to work for you, I used to mix something that he thought well of."

"Yes?"

"Silver fizz, Miss, using vodka rather than gin."

"Cunningham, you're a genius. One each, plus largish dividends, in thermos glasses. How soon will breakfast be ready?"

"Can't be sooner than twenty minutes, Miss, even though Della has started the sausages. But I could still fetch up coffee and

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juice."

"One trip only. Then steal quietly away on stocking feet. This is a hospital zone, Cunningham. Winnie and I need at least twenty minutes to put our eyeballs back in, they're bleeding. I'll expect you not sooner than twenty minutes, not later than twenty-five. Off."

She put down the bedside intercom, said, "Doctor, did I handle that?"

"Eunice, sometimes I think you're not truthful."

"And some time I'm going to be a hermit and not have to dodge servants. Where are your clothes, Roberto? In the lounge?"

"Yes. I had better get into them."

"Better think again. We've got twenty minutes of privacy, we'll use it."

"Oh, Eunice!"

"Courage, comrade; I'm not a black widow spider. We'll use it to gather up *all* clothes in the lounge; toss feminine items in here, fast—then take your clothes and Jake's down to his suite—where I'll grab a robe and pajamas and slippers for Jake, and a second set of his for you. If you're a sissy, you'll stay there and put them on. If you're not, you'll stay in skin and come back here with me and dress when you feel like it. Then I'll switch on a light that tells Winnie I'm awake—better than phoning the love bugs, they might be love-bugging, and even a bug hates to be disturbed at such times. Come on, you bony, hairy, wonderful man. Sixteen minutes—we can do it in twelve, I'll bet."

"Pussy Cat, sometimes you make me nervous."

"Oh, piffle, I own this house. Although I may sell it and buy a nudist resort in California—then run it just for me and my friends. Roberto, I *like* skin—when it's the wonderful skin I have now. It's meant to be seen and *touched*—not hidden away in clothes. Did you like our waitress last night?"

"A healthy young woman."

"Oh, piffle twice. I'll bet you were thinking about her when you took me to bed last night. I know men, darling—I *was* one, much longer than you've been alive. Fifteen minutes. Let's move."

TO BE CONCLUDED

LETTERS

(Continued from page 2)

Harlan Ellison

. . . I have just finished reading The Region Between. *It is the greatest science-fiction hoax since the Shaver Mystery "broke" in 1944 . . .*

George Wagner
Fort Thomas, Ky.

. . . Ellison's manner of expression inspires me . . . the meanings of the author are as clear as the sun on a cloudless day . . . you've filled an important niche in the past and perhaps inspired my future . . .

Yours,
Alice P. Alexander
Denver, Col.

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. . . lest I impart a false impression, I hasten to assert that I did enjoy the story . . . (but) for a writer of Ellison's stature to fail to wring out every positive aspect of a story (or the method utilized to narrate that story) is a sin.

Douglas Moench
Chicago, Ill.

. . . that story caused more eyestrain than any other story I've ever read but I needed the excercise anyway.

David Stever
Cochituate, Mass.

. . . The March Galaxy *has penetrated into Vietnam . . . and it may interest you to know that I was quite taken with Harlan Ellison's* The Region Between; *enough to nominate it for the Nebula Award . . And I have done so . . . I made the nomination in spite of the idiot blurb on the spine of that issue:* The Best in *Pertinent* Science Fiction. *(My italics) . . . This reader is still under 30 and I was really picking up bad vibrations from that string of words. Can you dig it?*

Hank Davis
APO San Francisco

I think some science fiction published is not particularly pertinent —while science fiction as a whole is probably the most pertinent writing being done today. And I want the best for *Galaxy.*

. . . The Region Between *was a pretty good science fiction yarn —but almost spoiled by the queer designs and cartography . . . necessary for the illiterate—but please let the rest of us do our own visualizing . . .*

Verne R. Fulmer
W. Islip, N.Y.

Vaughn Bodé

. . . Sunpot has been a great disappointment . . .

Grant Carrington
Gainesville, Fla.

. . . What have you done with Belinda Bump? She was the only feature in your magazine that set it apart from the others. Any mag can have an editorial, book reviews, and so forth. Where is there anything to compete with Belinda Bump?

I have been reading Galaxy without lapse for EGAD IS IT POSSIBLE? sixteen years! Mein Gott! That is a long time. Surely you can do something to make me feel glad to pull the new issues out of my mailbox. For a while I at least had Belinda to look forward to.

G. Guenther
New York, N.Y.

. . . I was upset to find no "Sunpot" *in the June issue. I'm not always sure of its story line, but it has fantasy, sex and humor—and it is different.*

Harry E. Mongold
Joliet, Ill.

. . . You have given three months' space (12 lost pages of literature!) to Bodé now. Our irritation and

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disgust has grown to the point where we feel we must make our opinion known to you. We have rarely in all our reading encountered material so poorly written, so sloppily drawn, so inartistic, so vulgar, so humorless . . .

Ursula Gibson
James Gibson
New Haven, Conn.

In Closing . . .

Few readers noticed anything but the Harlan Ellison story in the March *Galaxy*—or Danny Plachta's Last Night of the Festival in the February number. Comments pro and con were remarkably valid—you are a good group.

Till next time. —JAKOBSSON

THE WORLD OUTSIDE

(Continued from page 5)

unmistakable, and unambiguous.

He hears the rushing of the tide. He feels the crash of the waves against the sleek shining sands. He tastes salt water. The sun is high; the sky is aglow, a flawless blue. He has no regrets. It would have been impossible ever to leave the building again; if they had let him live it would have been only under conditions of constant surveillance. The urbmon's million million watching eyes. A lifetime hanging on the interface. What for? This is better. To have lived a little bit, just once. To have seen. The dancing, the bonfire, the smell of growing things. And now he is so tired, anyway. Rest will be welcome. He feels a sense of movement. Pushing the dolly again. In and then down. Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. Calmly descending. In his mind the leafy cliffs of Capri, the boy, the goat, the flask of cool golden wine. Fog and dolphins, thorns and pebbles. God bless! He laughs within his cocoon. Going down. Goodbye. Micaela. Stacion. Artha. A final vision of the building comes to him, its 885,000 people moving blankfaced through the crowded corridors, floating upward or downward in the transportation shafts, jamming themselves into the sonic centers and the somatic fulfillment halls, sending a myriad messages along the communications nexus as they ask for their meals, talk with one another, make assignations, negotiate. Breeding. Fruitful and multiply. Hundreds of thousands of people on interlocking orbits, each traveling his own little circuit within the mighty tower. How beautiful the world is and all that is in it. The urbmons at sunrise. The farmers' fields. Goodbye.

Darkness.

The journey is over. The source of peril has been eradicated. The urbmon has taken the necessary protective steps and an enemy of civilization has been removed. ☆

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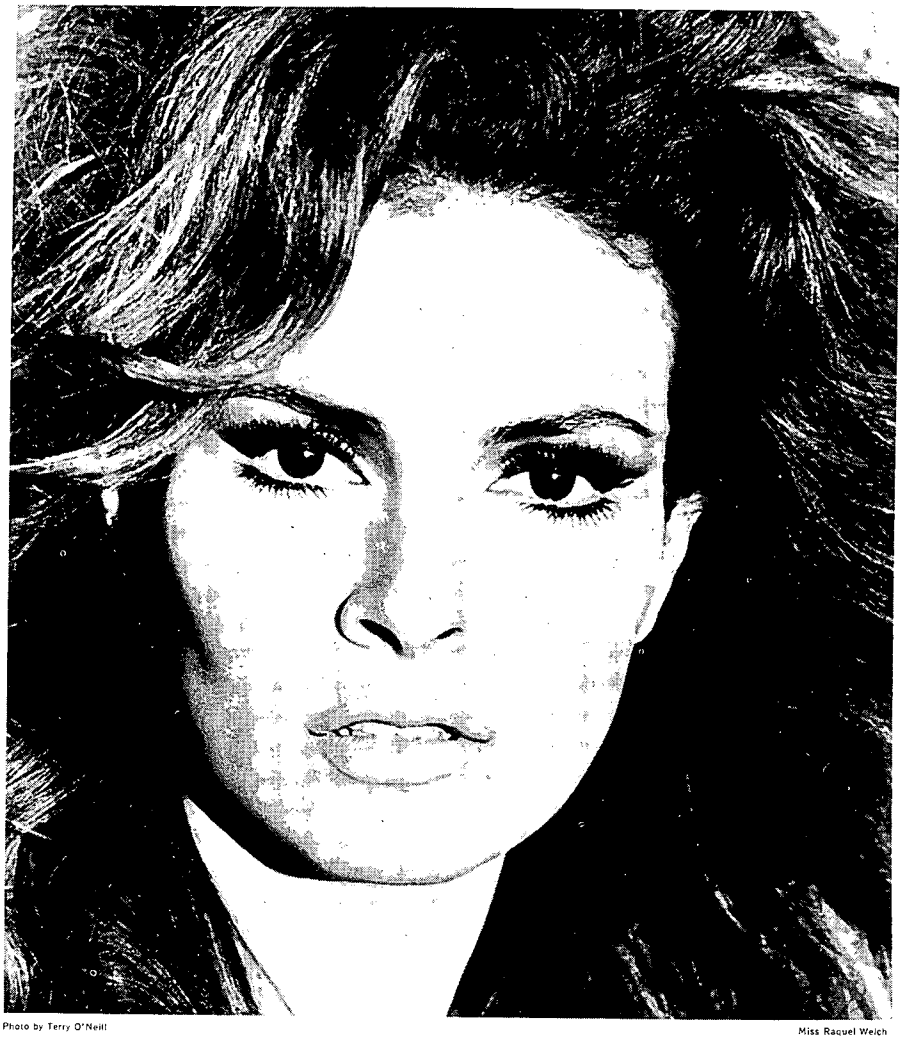

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Miss Raquel Welch

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4. Change in bowel or bladder habits.
5. Hoarseness or cough.
6. Indigestion or difficulty in swallowing.
7. Change in size or color of a wart or mole.

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Fight Cancer with a checkup and a check

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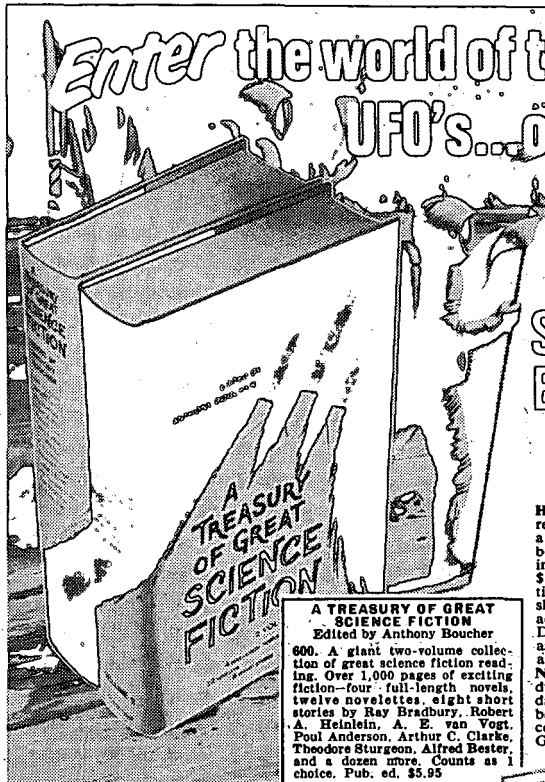

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